

**Empowerment in the context of climate change: How community-based organizations  
can play a role in engaging citizens**

by

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**ABSTRACT**

Climate change has been noted by many as “perhaps the most profound challenge ever to have confronted human social, political, and economic systems” (Dryzek, Norgaard, and Schlosberg 2011, 3). Humans around the world though, have failed to develop an effective response. Significant research in the past has explored the reasons why people choose not to take action on climate change; this research seeks to understand the motivations and experiences of those who do choose to take action on climate change. Through a case study methodology, this research uses in-depth interviews with participants of a Transition Initiative in southern Appalachia to understand both the individual process of empowerment and the role of the organization in that process. Results demonstrate the importance of the type of space that is created within the group, a space that is collaborative and safe for participants to explore and express their feelings, fears, and hopes. The results also note the significance the group placed on their focus on resilience, as opposed to mitigation of climate change within its work of awareness-raising and capacity-building. In developing and maintaining the organization, the group faced significant challenges navigating this new type of structure and the obstacles it presented. This research offers insight into the challenges as well as the opportunities presented by groups such as this one in working to increase empowerment in the context of climate change.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is considered by many to be the most formidable issue of our time. As Bill McKibben framed the issue in his book, *Eaarth*,

“...global warming is no longer a philosophical threat, no longer a future threat, *no longer a threat at all*. It's our reality....We need now to understand the world we've created, and consider - urgently - how to live in it. We can't simply keep stacking boulders against the change that's coming on every front; we'll need to figure out what parts of our lives and our ideologies we must abandon so that we can protect the core of our societies and civilizations” (2010, xiii–xiv).

Although it is impossible to identify climate change as the cause of any particular weather event, it is clear that the trends of increased unseasonal weather and extreme weather events can be seen worldwide. Climate change is happening here in Iowa and it is happening now.

As McKibben notes, a coordinated human response is needed to meet climate change head on. This would require that humans not only accept climate change and the human role in causing it, but that we all begin to make changes in our daily lives, in our communities, regions, and at national and international levels in order to thwart the growth of the problem. On an individual level though, polls repeated between 2008 and 2011 have found that Americans have become *less* convinced that climate change is an urgent, human-caused problem (Leiserowitz et al. 2011). Several researchers have even pointed to a negative association between wealth, both individual and national, and concern about climate change, meaning that as income increases, an individual's concern about climate change and desire to take voluntary action decreases (Sandvik 2008; O'Connor et al. 2002; Dunlap 1998).

As nations prepare to gather in June 2012 for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 20 years after the first UN conference on the topic, the global outlook is not good either. The highly anticipated 2011 UN climate conference in Durban, South Africa resulted in an agreement that member nations would develop an agreement on emission reductions by 2015 that would be put into play by 2020. This ‘deal to make a deal’ left many climate activists underwhelmed at best and despondent at worst. Within the United States, action at the national and state levels has been plagued by political infighting, with a partisan divide that has grown from 1997, when 48% of Republicans and 52% of Democrats in Congress agreed that climate change was happening shifted to 42% of Republicans and 76% of Democrats in 2008 (Dunlap and McCright 2008). This has left national and international politics in a poor position to effectively and adequately address climate change.

Over the past several years, social science research on climate change has grown rapidly, building on our understanding of individual communication styles, motivations, and barriers. Although continued understanding of climate messaging, understanding, and other communication issues are necessary, it has become apparent that communication alone will not significantly impact human action. Traditional methods of environmental public outreach, including fear-based communication, marketing of financial incentives, national-level policy action, etc. have faced significant difficulty in mobilizing Americans in the context of climate change.<sup>1</sup> Some research has even found that better informed individuals with a high degree of confidence in climate science feel less personally responsible for climate change and are less

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Bardsley and Rogers 2011; Center for Research on Environmental Decisions 2009; Collins and Ison 2009; Jackson 2005; Maibach and Priest 2009; McCright and Dunlap 2000; McKenzie-Mohr and Smith 1999; Nisbet and Kotcher 2009; S. J. O’Neill and Hulme 2009; S. O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009; Ockwell, Whitmarsh, and O’Neill 2009; Sterman 2008

concerned about climate change (Kellstedt, Zahran, and Vedlitz 2008). Research from Kari Norgaard indicates that “the widely presumed links between public access to information on climate change and levels of concern and action are not supported” (2009, i). In her research on denial in climate-impacted areas of Norway, Norgaard further noted,

“Although information-deficit explanations<sup>2</sup> are indispensable, they do not account for the behavior of the significant number of people who do know about global warming, believe it is happening, and express concern about it. Nor can they explain why levels of concern are decreasing as scientific consensus increases and predictions about the consequences of climate change become more severe” (2006, 348).

Instead, research has increasingly related human responses to climate change’s overwhelming scope, breadth, and implications to individual defense mechanisms, including apathy and denial (Lertzman 2009; Norgaard 2009; Norgaard 2006). These responses require the use of different methods to solve the climate problem, a different way of engaging people in creating change. I argue that the issue of climate change fits into accepted schema of disempowering environments and thus, there are benefits to looking at climate engagement from an empowerment perspective.

The topic of empowerment has inspired research in a variety of disciplines, including community psychology and public health promotion, related to community-based organizations and their use of empowering processes to achieve empowered outcomes<sup>3</sup>. As defined by

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<sup>2</sup> *Information-deficit explanations* refers to an assumption “that the public are ‘empty vessels’ waiting to be filled with useful information on which they will then rationally act” (Ockwell, Whitmarsh, and O’Neill 2009, 321).

<sup>3</sup> For more research on empowerment, see (Mankowski and Rappaport 1995; Rappaport 1995; Perkins 1995; Speer and Hughey 1995; Peterson and Zimmerman 2004; Rich 1995; Maton 2008; Maton and Salem 1995; Zimmerman 1995; Rubin and Rubin 2001; Florin and Wandersman 1990; Kahn 1991, etc.).

Zimmerman, *empowering processes* “are ones in which attempts to gain control, obtain needed resources, and critically understand one’s social environment are fundamental” and *empowered outcomes* refer to the results of becoming empowered, i.e., “perceived control, skills, and proactive behaviors” (2000, 51). This interplay of empowering processes and outcomes theoretically results in individuals who see themselves as having the capacity to act and create change as a result of the work of an organization which serves to assist the individuals in reaching this renewed sense of self. With an issue like climate change which causes most people to feel small and unproductive, these processes that cause people to feel powerful and effective can offer insight into possible opportunities for engagement.

### ***Research Goals & Questions***

In assessing how empowerment functions in the context of climate change, this study seeks to underscore the importance of understanding the individual process of empowerment and the ways in which that process can be supported by community-based organizations. Climate change is an international problem and it is critical that action take place on a variety of scales (regional, national, international). However, it is unlikely that action will happen on the broader scales if localized movements do not create a supportive base for that action. It is necessary for organizations to understand how to best engage individuals in order to engender this supportive base. Accordingly, this research asks the following questions:

1. How has the individual process of empowerment taken place for members of Transition Gardiner?
2. How specifically, has Transition Gardiner been able to encourage or assist that process?

In answering these questions, this research uses a single case study methodology. The community-based organization in the spotlight is a Transition Initiative. Transition Initiatives, also known as Transition Towns, are part of a movement initially developed in the United

Kingdom that focus on addressing climate change, peak oil, and economic instability at the community level. Through the case study, the research seeks to examine the process of empowerment by thoroughly understanding the experiences of a group of individuals within a specific context. This knowledge can offer insight to organizations and individuals attempting to address climate change in their own communities throughout the country.

### ***Research Approach***

Many researchers who have studied empowerment have noted that being a part of a community-based organization is critical, offering participants shared context, tools, skills, and opportunities to collectively address their concerns in a peer-based environment (i.e. Peterson and Zimmerman 2004; Florin and Wandersman 1990). Others have focused on the role of the community in providing a setting that encourages or at least, allows empowerment (i.e. Rich 1995; Speer and Hughey 1995). Still others have focused specifically on the individual process of empowerment, utilizing the experiences of the individual to understand the phenomenological or narrative experience of becoming empowered (i.e. Cornell Empowerment Group 1989; Rappaport 1995; Perkins and Zimmerman 1995). Nonetheless, there appears to be consensus in the empowerment literature that these three scales are inextricably interrelated. As Zimmerman states, “The challenge for researchers interested in empowerment is not to ignore one level of analysis in the interest of another but to struggle with efforts to integrate levels of analysis for understanding the construct in its entirety” (1990a, 173).

This case study therefore looks at the work of a community-based organization through three lenses: the individual process of empowerment; the ability of the organization to empower; and the community context in which these processes take place. While knowledge of the community setting provides a sense of the context, the focus of the research is on the two former

levels of analysis. The setting is a small town (population ~ 10,000) in a rural county (population ~ 100,000)<sup>4</sup> in the Appalachian Mountains. For the purpose of anonymity, I will use the pseudonym Gardiner for the town's name. The community-based organization, a Transition Initiative, offers a unique model for change in that it focuses on tangible, positive, localized outcomes which are created by grassroots volunteer organizing. In the process, opportunities for individual empowerment are abundant. Although there are elements of empowerment theory that emerged throughout the interviews, there were also new ideas, theories, and linkages that emerged and created opportunities for learning.

### ***Assumptions***

Several assumptions are implied by the design and conduct of this research. One large assumption is that humans *should* address climate change. There is now consensus in the climate science community that climate change is real and consensus on how severe and harmful it will be has nearly been reached (Dryzek, Norgaard, and Schlosberg 2011). With the natural science knowledge that we have, it is assumed that climate change is something to which humans should be responding. A second assumption then is that individual action will make an impact. Certainly, the greater political system has shown that individuals face significant difficulties in taking active, participatory roles in defining our shared direction. Attempts by individuals and groups to participate in the UN conferences on climate change, for example, have proven largely ineffective. Gaining a functional participatory role remains a substantial hurdle that needs to be surmounted for individuals to have access to the decision-making process.

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<sup>4</sup> The county is part of a four-county metropolitan statistical area (MSA) of a city in a neighboring county. The population of the MSA is about 400,000. However, while the U.S. Census (1995) defines an urban or urban fringe area as having a density of at least 1,000 persons per square mile, the county in which this research has been conducted has a population density of approximately 200 persons per square mile. Although it is a part of an MSA, the county has a decidedly rural feel.

A third assumption is that the hurdle presented by individual defense mechanisms can be overcome. The decline in interest and concern demonstrated by Leiserowitz et al's 2008-2011 surveys raise concerns about the validity of this assumption. If Americans are becoming more disinterested in climate change, what is the likelihood that this desired change is possible? Of course, that points to a fourth assumption which is that the research on defense mechanisms is accurate and that these are, indeed, playing a key role in why citizens are not becoming engaged. Certainly if the goal of this research is to identify empowerment strategies that could assist in addressing defense mechanisms, there is an implicit assumption of the validity of defense mechanisms as a real and true role in the individual thought process.

### ***Researcher Perspective***

My personal experience also creates assumptions within the research as I am working to understand my own process of empowerment within the context of climate change. Not long ago, if someone mentioned global warming to me, I would likely roll my eyes and utter a snide remark about the inadequacy of changing light bulbs or the other “small steps” offered by the climate movement for individual action. I found them somewhat demeaning as an active member of society, an under-appreciation of my capacity for understanding the system blocks that exist. Simultaneously, I lived in places that were largely unaffected by climate change and if they were being affected, the changes were so small and gradual that they were easy to ignore. The fact that no one in my community was talking about climate change made it even easier.

A year and a half ago, I moved to Iowa to begin graduate school. I could not drive to school so I began to ride my bike. We are lucky to have an excellent food co-op in Ames and so my shopping habits began to change. I started becoming healthier, but also, I began to feel like for once, I was “doing the right thing” as a latent environmentalist. That fall, I saw Bill

McKibben, the founder of 350.org, speak at Iowa State. His speech impressed upon me the gravity and immediacy of climate change. I was moved by his triptych display of photos of incredible natural disasters happening now in the world, set next to graphs depicting the latest climate models, set next to photos of environmental activism in the developing world. I left his talk feeling deeply the agency of the issue of climate change and a strong desire to become involved.

At the same time, I was seeking out a thesis topic. Given my changing behavior patterns and my perhaps stereotypical moment of enlightenment with Bill McKibben, I realized that I wanted to do something related to climate change. Unfortunately, most of the existing research left me wanting. Most of the research I found at the outset was quantitative whereas my interest and life experience made me want to explore the created meanings and deeper contextual elements of the human experience. Also, much of the existing research focuses on the negative. Instead of focusing on what people *are* doing and why, it focuses on what people are *not* doing and why. This is not to say that I think this research is unimportant; I think it is critically important for us to understand the negative elements of actions and behavior. But as someone recently entering “the light” of climate change and searching and hoping for better options, it did not entice me as an area of research. Nonetheless, as I was reading dozens and dozens of these articles as well as blogs and news stories of positive, proactive work being done in communities around the world, my own process of empowerment continued to evolve.

I did not really realize all of these changes until I went home to Oregon and was excitedly telling friends about my research and talking about climate change. Their responses of “Oh, that’s depressing,” or “Well, that’s your generation’s burden to bear,” surprised me for two reasons. One, I had become distanced enough from that disengaged and disdainful viewpoint in

my own life that it surprised me to hear it again. Then, I was surprised that I was surprised! Something about me had changed. My perspective on climate change had shifted without my noticing it. I had buried my nose in the books without realizing that the books were beginning to provide me with a sense of community – albeit national and international in scope. There were people out there in the world who were working on this, struggling with it, trying to figure it out. I was a part of that group now and I was surprised to realize that I had left the disengaged.

Throughout the rest of this research process, I have worked to honor the reflexive tradition of qualitative research, trying to look at my own responses just as I try to assess an interviewee's responses. This process has undoubtedly helped to move me along the process of empowerment. I would not say I am hopeful about climate change, but I feel like I have the ability to offer something. I have the capacity to act on climate change and my sense of self-efficacy has increased. I am not at the end of this road. Watching and measuring the results of my actions will continue to give me feedback that I will incorporate into my own sense of efficacy and my critical awareness of the world. For now, I am trying to maintain my awareness of myself, deepening my understanding of the process of empowerment by watching it first-hand. This autoethnographic experience creates a set of assumptions about how this process might work for others. However, my constructivist epistemology begs me to remember that this is the meaning of empowerment to me alone and to work to offer others the respect to look beyond my own assumptions to try to understand how they construct the meaning of empowerment in their lives.

My hope is that this research will offer insight to groups working to engage citizens around climate change, helping them to understand both the constraints and obstacles faced by individuals and the great and abundant opportunities that exist. This understanding may help to

define the type and structure of organization developed as well as the goals and outreach strategies utilized. As Dryzek, Norgaard, and Schlosberg state in *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, “One of the central social, political, and economic questions of the century is: how then do we act?” (2011, 3). This research seeks to assist in answering that question.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Barriers to Engagement with Climate Change*

Although climate change is necessarily a natural science issue, this literature review will focus on social science perspectives and research. As the National Research Council has noted, we are at the beginning of a “‘new era of climate change research,’ one that requires a much stronger emphasis than previously on the understanding of human-environment systems and a much greater integration of the social and behavioral sciences with the other sciences concerned with climate change” (2010a, 1; citing National Research Council 2010b). Over the past ten years, social science research on climate change has increased and included research within a variety of disciplines. Within the social science literature, this review focuses specifically on that segment pertaining to cognitive and behavioral responses to climate change.

One of the main underlying pieces of human experience of climate change relates to the wide variety of ‘barriers to engagement,’ including climate change’s complexity and a lack of widespread citizen comprehension; its distance in space and time, i.e., the sense that it is not happening ‘right here’ or ‘right now’; its overwhelming nature; and the radical lifestyle changes that acceptance of it would require (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole, and Whitmarsh 2007). As Gifford et al state,

...the problem is the well-known gap between environmental attitudes and behavior. This gap is caused by various barriers. For some, structural barriers (e.g., poverty and climate-averse infrastructure) hinder behavior change, but for others the barriers are psychological. Structural barriers may be lowered with social programs and infrastructure improvements, but psychological barriers are, arguably, more difficult to overcome (2011, 811)

This conceptualization of the human experience forms the basis of our understanding that humans confront a number of complex, internal and external challenges in considering action on climate change.

Gifford et al (2011) developed a framework that illustrates the process through which these barriers emerge, beginning with an initial appraisal of the threatening information, such as information about climate change. This is followed by coping appraisals which allow the individual to evaluate how they can cope with and respond to the information. These include “assessments of one’s ability to engage in a particular behavior, the likelihood that the behavior will lead to a particular outcome, constraints on response options (such as lack of resources and social support) and the relative costs and benefits of any feasible preventative action” (2011, 810). The individual’s ultimate response is also influenced by their overall understanding of climate change, their capacity for influence, and the personal impact of the various barriers they face. This understanding of the internal process is helpful in understanding how and why these barriers emerge and are managed by the individual.

In a working paper for the World Bank, Norgaard (2009) analyzed much of the research that has been done on barriers to engagement, including psychological and conceptual barriers, social and cultural barriers, and structural or political economic barriers. Some of the research was specifically related to climate change and some came from other fields but is highly relevant in this context. Those most closely related to this research are summarized in the table below.

**Table 1: Description of ‘Barriers to Engagement’**

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Relevant Articles</b>
Cognitive Dissonance	People may block out or deny information that clashes with their worldview in order to maintain stability. In the context of climate change, this means that one barrier to engagement is that accepting climate change means believing in something that conflicts with ideas about the world and the future.	(Cohen 2001; Stoll-Kleemann, O’Riordan, and Jaeger 2001)

**Table 1 (continued)**

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Relevant Articles</b>
Ontological Security	Similar to cognitive dissonance in reaction, “ontological security refers to the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action.” Climate change threatens the idea that the future will be similar to the world in which one lives now and therefore, the need for the security offered by that constancy may cause some to deny or block information on climate change.	(Giddens 1991 quoted p. 92)
Desire to Protect Individual Identity	People may see climate change, or more aptly, their own lack of action on climate change as an affront to their identity. For example, if someone views themselves as a responsible citizen, admitting the importance of climate change could cause them to view themselves negatively when they fail to take action or fail to ‘do the right thing.’	(Gecas and Burke 1995)
Emotional Norms	When individuals do consider climate change, they are often confronted by feelings of fear, helplessness, and guilt. To avoid these negative feelings, people may resort to denial of the issue. “Emotions of fear and helplessness can be managed through the use of selective attention, such as controlling one's exposure to information, not thinking too far into the future, and focusing on something that could be done.”	(Giddens 1991; Norgaard 2006; Norgaard 2009, quoted p. 28)
Cultural Norms	Cultural norms can encourage people to avoid thinking about climate change, oftentimes through norms regarding what topics make for ‘acceptable conversation’. For example, in cultures where it is common to focus on ‘the here and now,’ norms can support people in disregarding emotionally-charged issues by discouraging them from being raised in conversation. This goes beyond climate change to include other overwhelming and distant issues like starvation in Africa, riots in East Timor, and so on. On her research in Norway, Norgaard (2009) notes “Collectively holding information about global warming at arm's length took place by participating in cultural norms of attention, emotion, and conversation, and by using a series of cultural narratives to deflect disturbing information and normalize a particular version of reality in which ‘everything is fine.’”	(Zerubavel 2006; Norgaard 2009, quoted p. 27)
Lack of Efficacy	“People stop paying attention to global climate change when they realize that there is no easy solution for it. Many people judge as serious only those problems for which they think action can be taken.”	(Norgaard 2009, 34; Krosnick et al. 2006; Kellstedt, Zahran, and Vedlitz 2008)

These various barriers to engagement are reinforced by discourses and framing of climate change

in the media that present climate change as ambiguous and unconfirmed, misinformation

campaigns like those conducted by the Heartland Institute to spread climate skepticism (Goldenberg 2012), and efforts by the fossil fuel and other industries to influence policy discourse about climate change (Norgaard 2009). Altogether, they contribute to the general disempowerment of the American public.

To summarize, the existing literature on cognitive and behavioral responses to climate change has focused on understanding barriers to engagement. Barriers are abundant, complex, and interrelated. Both internal and external in nature, these barriers offer insight into why individuals have, in large part, failed to respond to climate change. This thesis focuses on individuals who are beginning to respond to climate change. While the focus is different, these behavioral responses do not disappear once one has decided to do something about climate change. They can be seen in interviewees' recollections of past emotions as well as their accounts of current struggles. The existing research therefore creates opportunities for evaluating progress towards empowerment and for better understanding the challenges that interviewees have likely faced along their journey.

### ***Empowerment Theory***

Empowerment has been subject to considerable research in the field of community psychology. Although several definitions have been offered by the literature, there appears to be consensus on the key threads of the idea as follows: "An intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources" (Wiley and Rappaport 2000; cited in Aber et al. 2010, 2). In the case of climate change, 'valued resources' might represent access to the policy-making process or greater individual or community resilience. Others have suggested that the development of a

critical awareness of the sociopolitical environment is another key to becoming truly empowered (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995; Rappaport 1995; Rubin and Rubin 2001; Zimmerman et al. 1992). Riger added to this concept by framing empowerment not within an idea of people “fighting with others for power and control. Rather, we should consider *connection* as important as empowerment” (1993, 290 emphasis added by author). These definitions offer insight into the complexity of empowerment, but also into its critically important nature in creating opportunities for individual and social change.

In studying empowerment, it has been noted by several authors that focusing on only one level of analysis can be highly detrimental to developing a deep understanding, because “empowerment is achieved collectively” (Rubin and Rubin 2001, 61). Because of this focus on the connection between individual empowerment and organizational processes, empowerment is further defined as “a group-based, participatory, developmental process” (Maton 2008, 5). On individual empowerment, Zimmerman notes that there are three components that merge to form a picture of an empowered person who “believes that he or she has the capability to influence a given context (intrapersonal component), understands how the system works in that context (interactional component), and engages in behaviors to exert control in the context (behavioral component)” (1995, 590). Kieffer (1984) has added to this understanding of the individual process by framing it as a multi-year progression through which the individual enters the state of empowerment, advances his/her level of empowerment, incorporates empowerment into his/her life, and finally commits to this new worldview.

The longer participants extend their involvement, the more they come to understand. The more they understand, the more motivated they are to continue to act. The more they continue to act, the more proactive they are able to be. The more proactive they are able to be, the more they further their skill and effect. The more they sense their skill and effect, the more likely they are to continue (Kieffer 1984, 22).

It should be noted that through all of this research, empowerment is maintained as a process that “takes on a different form in different people and contexts” (Rappaport 1984, 2).

Empowering organizational settings have been studied by many researchers, but have been perhaps most clearly elucidated by Maton. In his 2008 article in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*, he further developed findings first outlined in 1995 (Maton 2008; Maton and Salem 1995). These characteristics fall into six key categories: presence of a group-based belief system; engaging and active core activities; a relational environment; a pervasive and accessible opportunity role structure; inspirational and committed leadership; and a setting wherein change is learning- and bridging-focused. These organizational characteristics are believed to create a setting within which individuals become empowered. Finally, it is important to recognize that all life occurs within a community context; therefore, an understanding of the community setting and the opportunities and challenges it offers is also critical (Maton and Brodsky 2010).

### ***Efficacy***

It is useful to briefly go into greater depth on efficacy because of its importance to both barriers to engagement with climate change and empowerment theory. As described by Bandura (1977), efficacy “is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the [desired] outcomes” (193). Bandura argues that perceived self-efficacy can inform an individual’s choice of activities and settings and eventually, as they succeed within those settings, may encourage them to enter into settings or activities in which they are less confident because their coping mechanisms have been increased by their experience of success over time. Individuals may also increase their sense of self-efficacy through vicarious experience and verbal persuasion, i.e. “seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences”

(Bandura 1977, 197) or being persuaded by others “into believing that they can cope successfully with what has overwhelmed them in the past” (Bandura 1977, 198). To the contrary, self-efficacy can be diminished by the experience of negative emotions such as fear or anxiety because individuals rely on these emotions to judge their vulnerability (Bandura 1977).

These factors play into an individual’s perceived self-efficacy; however, once a sense of self-efficacy is gained, self-efficacy can have an influence on success. “Perceived self-efficacy influences performance both directly and through its strong effects on goal setting and analytic thinking. Personal goals, in turn, enhance performance attainments through analytic strategies” (Bandura 1993, 128). Bandura (1993) notes several factors, such as the development of challenging goals that can help to sustain this motivation. Beyond the focus on self-efficacy, theories on collective efficacy take these principles and apply them to an individual’s sense of the effectiveness of a group, working together. This is useful because “people do not live their lives as social isolates” (Bandura 1982, 143), thus this allows us to consider these same barriers and opportunities in the context of an organizational setting.

Perceptions of self- and collective efficacy are important in the context of climate change because there is much about climate change that defies a sense of efficacy (Adger et al. 2009, etc.). Many of the barriers to engagement that exist function to decrease perceived efficacy. However, the perception of efficacy is a focal point of the literature on empowerment, arguing that one cannot be empowered if one lacks the sense that their actions may be impactful. Understanding the theory of efficacy helps build an understanding of how it can be fostered through the process of empowerment.

### ***Social Capital***

In 1916, Lyda Hanifan provided one of, if not the first definition of social capital.

I do not refer to real estate or to personal property or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of a people, namely, goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit (1916, 130).

Since that early definition, social capital has been subjected to innumerable studies. It has been identified as having two main types or forms of connection: bonding and bridging.

Bonding social capital describes the links between people with similar objectives and is manifested in local groups... Bridging describes the capacity of such groups to make links with others that may have different views (Pretty 2003, 1913).

Each of these forms of connection is visible in the results of this research, either in their presence or absence.

Within the focus of this research, social capital is a useful theoretical perspective in broadening the understanding of the benefits to individuals of engaging in empowering organizations with other empowered individuals, benefits such as increased confidence, trust, and motivation. For example, Pretty (2003) identifies one of these benefits as follows: "As social capital lowers the transaction costs of working together, it facilitates cooperation. People have the confidence to invest in collective activities, knowing that others will also do so" (1913). In contrast to the 'free rider' theory, which argues that self-interested people will choose not to pay into a system because they know that others will take up the slack, this theory argues that the knowledge that others are participating actually motivates and encourages others to join.

Granovetter (1983) contributed greatly to our understanding of social capital with his work on the differences between strong and weak ties and the benefits and drawbacks of each. He summarizes these using a sample citizen, Ego.

Ego will have a collection of close friends, most of whom are in touch with one another – a densely knit clump of social structure [strong ties]. Moreover, Ego will have a collection of acquaintances, few of whom know one another [weak ties]. Each of these

acquaintances, however, is likely to have close friends in his own right and therefore to be enmeshed in a closely knit clump of social structure, but one different from Ego's. The weak tie between Ego and his acquaintance, therefore, becomes not merely a trivial acquaintance tie but rather a crucial bridge between the two densely knit clumps of close friends. To the extent that the assertion of the previous paragraph is correct, these clumps would not, in fact, be connected to one another at all were it not for the existence of weak ties (1983, 202).

Granovetter argues that those who lack these bridging weak ties will be deprived of information and may find it difficult to organize into political movements since they will only be able to recruit from within their smaller group of strong ties. From a macroscopic perspective, an entire social system that lacks weak ties “will be fragmented and incoherent. New ideas will spread slowly, scientific endeavors will be handicapped, and subgroups separated by race, ethnicity, geography, or other characteristics will have difficulty reaching a modus vivendi” (1983, 202). This can be even more important where the innovation or information being shared is controversial (Steinberg 1980).

Granovetter goes on to cite Coser (1975) who argues that an abundance of strong ties and a lack of weak ties may cause an individual to fail to understand the interrelatedness of their life with the greater outside world and therefore, might cause them to miss opportunities to broaden the value of their work. Instead, having a number of participants or employees with a number of bridging weak ties can improve the flexibility and success of an organization, “since the ability to function in complex voluntary organizations may depend on a habit of mind that permits one to assess the needs, motives, and actions of a great variety of different people simultaneously” (Granovetter 1983, 204). This demonstrates the benefit that an abundance of weak ties can offer.

However, strong ties can offer great benefits as well. In an influential work on social capital, Coleman (1988) states that social capital “comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action... a group within which there is extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust is able to accomplish more than a comparable group without that

trustworthiness and trust” (S100–S101). This speaks to the importance of bonding and creating strong ties within a group. Additionally, Granovetter (1983) argues that strong ties offer greater motivation and are typically more available to the individual than weak ties. However, there may also be negative effects of overly strong social ties within a group such as when it creates cliques that create competitiveness between groups and serve to keep outsiders from gaining access (Portes 1998; Pretty and Ward 2001; Bearden and et al 1975).

It is clear that these different forms of social capital, bonding and bridging, strong and weak ties, offer different benefits and challenges to the individual and to the proponent of social capital. As Weimann (1980) noted, strong ties have the benefit of offering fast, credible information, greater influence, and sometimes, access to decision-making while weak ties assist dispersal of information and innovation by providing bridges between groups. In addition to those benefits and challenges noted above, this description helps to build an understanding of the dynamic nature of social capital and the variation between the types of relationships people have with one another.

### ***Relating Climate Change and Empowerment***

Due to the use of multiple levels of analysis and empowerment’s contextual nature, it has been argued that it is easier to define empowerment in its absence (i.e., powerlessness, alienation, etc.) than to define it positively (Rappaport 1984; Zimmerman 1990a). In their text, *Community Organizing and Development*, Rubin & Rubin delineate many of the factors involved in *disempowering* settings. Several of these factors are articulated below in Table 2, with a description of how they are embodied in the context of climate change.

**Table 2: Disempowerment in the Context of Climate Change**

<b>Factor of Disempowerment</b> (pp. from Rubin & Rubin, 2001)	<b>Embodiment in Climate Change</b>
The problem is pervasive (p. 6).	Climate change is an issue that affects every person in the world, regardless of race, class, etc.
The problem is based on structural failings and cultural values that people by themselves cannot combat (p. 7). This factor often incorporates <i>learned inefficacy</i> , “when people falsely accept the belief that they are not competent to fix a problem and as such become apathetic” (p. 67).	Many of the issues with climate change stem from industrial carbon emissions which are encouraged (or at least, not actively discouraged) by our government (Ford 2003; Luke 2005; Rich 1995) which leads many to feel discouraged. This also correlates with the “psychological barriers” to engagement with climate change (Adger, 2009; Adger et al. 2009; Lorenzoni et al., 2007, etc.).
People are intentionally disempowered by hegemonic structures that enforce beliefs that people are dependent on the existing system and therefore should not fight it, and that in any case, questioning authority is wrong. Also labeled by Gramsci (1973) as <i>intellectual hegemony</i> , this factor often incorporates an <i>organization of consent</i> through which “people accept the cultural value put forth in schools, the media, and in daily life that justify their subordination” (p. 65). Problems are intensified by <i>system bias</i> , “a subtle way of controlling by hiding how decisions are actually made while a related but even more subtle form of disempowerment involves... <i>nondecisions</i> ... [wherein] important questions about the allocation of resources or actions of government are never asked, there is no forum for their discussion, so that contention over these issues cannot possibly take place” (p. 69).	This is related in some ways to the factor noted above and has been studied by many critical theorists, but perhaps articulated most directly by two articles by McCright & Dunlap (2000; 2003) which outline efforts that have been made by the Republican party to frame the climate change issue as non-negotiable and non-problematic, which could effectively serve as a <i>nondecision</i> . This factor was also discussed at length in an article by Rich (1995) on empowerment in the broader context of environmental action.  System biases and hegemony in the context of climate change have been further noted by several researchers, including many in the field of “climate justice” (Pettit 2004; Roper 2005; Martin 1997; Holifield, Porter, and Walker 2010; Dowling 2010). The problem has probably been best articulated by Ford in his statement that “Global governance - including that of the environment - is seen as embedded in the neoliberal global political economy, which is hegemonic in the neo-Gramscian sense that dominant power relations are maintained by consent as well as coercion” (2003, 120-121).

This brief analysis suggests that climate change fits into the schema of a disempowering setting. Unfortunately, there are many people who benefit from our economic and political systems the way that they currently exist and, as addressing climate change would mean

significant changes to those systems, it is an issue which does not sit well with those who benefit. It is interesting to note though, that because of climate change's pervasiveness, those who are reinforcing the system biases, hegemony, and other forms of disempowerment will be affected by the negative effects of climate change just as everyone else will, although many in the climate justice movement accurately argue that the world's poor will be impacted far more seriously and sooner than the world's wealthy (Dryzek, Norgaard, and Schlosberg 2011; Norgaard 2009; Pettit 2004; Moore and Russell 2011). Still, this pervasiveness creates a situation in which *all* Americans are effectively disempowered by the state of the current system, creating not islands of disenfranchised, powerless populations, but entire societies.

If we view empowerment as “expressed through membership in an organization, relationship building with community members, and practice of an action-reflection dialectic through the organizing cycle” (Speer and Hughey 1995, 736), and we view climate change as an issue that is functionally disempowering, there is good reason to seek out the specific ways in which empowering processes happen, or could happen within this context in order to develop a new method of engagement with climate change, based not on psychological defense mechanisms but on mobilization, empowerment, and action. As Rubin & Rubin state, “when people feel confidence in others, and often in themselves, they are willing to experiment with new ideas, verbalize different solutions, and daringly suggest that change is possible” (2001, 89).

Many researchers have noted power relations and disempowerment as restraining factors on individual responses to climate change (Fraser et al. 2006; Heiskanen et al. 2010; Ensor and Berger 2009, etc.). However, none have considered *how* empowerment might occur in the context of climate change, what might be the specific needs of people facing climate change, or what might be the opportunities for community organizations to fill that role. Two articles have

approached this gap. One, written by Middlemiss and Parish (2010) studied two grassroots initiatives in the UK and US which were working to reduce carbon emissions in their communities. Although it referenced empowerment, it did not actually share any insights into how that empowerment may have been assisted or facilitated by the community groups and what, if any, particular challenges were raised by climate change within that process. A second article, written by Quimby and Angelique (2011) used a survey of people associated with environmental groups and global climate change activists to identify catalysts and barriers to making behavior changes. The catalysts for making behavior changes included “empowerment and efficacy, a greater sense of hope, and social acceptance” (394); however, the ‘opportunities’ recommended by Quimby and Angelique relate more to advocacy-type methods (communication, marketing, event planning, etc.) than those generally recognized as *empowering* processes. In conclusion, although much research has pointed to the need for further research to provide a deeper understanding of empowerment and methods for engaging Americans in the context of climate change, to date no research has effectively taken up the task.

### CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This research has been designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How has the individual process of empowerment taken place for members of Transition Gardiner?
2. How specifically, has Transition Gardiner been able to encourage or assist that process?

To answer these questions, the research used a single case study approach to bring depth of understanding to this topic, identifying key strategies that were used by Transition Gardiner (TG) and bringing them to light for the benefit of organizations being started in other communities around the country. Methods used were in-depth interviews with active leaders and members of the organization and two smaller, subsidiary groups of the organization, triangulated by data from participant observation, content analysis, and autoethnography.

Case studies offer the opportunity to develop thick, rich descriptions of programs, creating a thorough understanding of the circumstances and context within which they exist and the characteristics of the people involved. Single case studies also offer the opportunity to incorporate a deeper understanding of the nature, values, and norms of the broader community. They consist of in-depth research with the goal of providing insight into a larger issue. As Geertz has described it, “the aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts” (1973, 28). Creswell et al state that “...the focus in case study research is not predominantly on the individual (and their stories) as in narrative research but on the *issue* with the individual case selected to understand the issue” (2007, 246, emphasis added). This research aims to provide insight into the issue of empowerment in the context of climate change by understanding more thoroughly the examples set by a single case. As Yin states, “You would use the case study method because you deliberately want to cover contextual conditions - believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (2003, 13). In order

for this research to assist other communities working to start their own organizations, an understanding of TG's context is critical to allowing other organizations to evaluate the transferability to their own communities.

### ***Case Selection***

A key question to ask is *why* to select TG. In his book on case study research, Yin (2009) defined four rationales for single case studies: critical cases, extreme cases, representative cases, and revelatory cases. Although it has some atypical characteristics, I would argue this case is a representative, or typical case. "The objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation... The lessons learned from these cases are assumed to be informative about the experiences of the average person or institution" (Yin 2009, 48). Gardiner is a beautiful little town near the mountains. It has a bustling, well-restored downtown and historic Main Street. On a sunny day, which happens often in the region, the downtown is busy with office workers, tourists, and locals enjoying the district's restaurants and shopping. The area has grown in the last several years, particularly with new retirees from around the South and beyond. Gardiner is close to a major city (population ~ 80,000) that is well known for its artistic, liberal leanings. In the 1970s, Gardiner was home to a well-known 'back to the land' community and eco-village. As one interviewee noted, "There are a lot of innovative things going on here... uh, so there's a lot of stuff happening here which is exciting" (Sue 2011). It is likely that these factors have contributed to an empowering community setting (Maton and Salem 1995) and that the presence of an empowering community setting has assisted the group in its success thus far.

However, many of my interviewees spoke to the lack of empowerment in the community setting as well. They talked about large divisions between groups in the community, issues with transparency in the local government, and the conservative nature of the community. While just

under 60% of the county's residents voted for McCain/Palin in 2008, in the most recent election in November 2010, Republicans took 64% to over 70% of the votes in various races. In all but one of those races, Republicans won every district in the county and in several more races, Republicans ran unopposed (County Board of Elections 2010). As Republicans typically believe less in climate change than Democrats (Dunlap and McCright 2008), this partisan analysis identifies a significant portion of the population who may not be supportive of the goals of groups like TG. One interviewee commented,

...my sense is it's very conservative, from what I read in the newspaper of letters to the editor and such, it's probably pretty much what you would expect for a town in the South that is Republican-leaning politically, um, conservative, um, nothing wrong with that, but we're talking about some issues that some people of that ilk seem to deny even exist (Noah 2011).

As another interviewee expanded on the social dynamics in the community,

You've got the mountainy people, you've got the rednecks, you've got the good old boys, you've got the blow-ins, and then you've got the blow-ins that have been here for 30, 40, 50 years, so that's like the old blow-ins and the new blow-ins, so that's like 6 different segments of this community that don't have an awful lot to do with each other (Linda 2011).

Another noted, "I really had a serious question in my mind if there were enough people in Gardiner that would say yes to something like this" (Bill 2011). These comments challenge the notion that Gardiner provides an entirely empowering community setting and reifies its suitability as a typical case. In an example of this contrasting community setting, one interviewee stated,

My feeling was that it was pretty radical for our community when we started and I would, I've since been proven a little bit wrong – there's more people interested in these things than I realized, I think most of the other... members would probably voice the same thing, uh, so there's a certain percentage out there that aren't heard or haven't connected with other people because this is a fairly conservative area but we had the trends on our side from the economic situation being what it is... it's kind of hard, you know, there are plenty of people that are hurting, and uh, kind of talk about the issue, we just found a lot more supporters than a lot of us thought we would and have not found much, haven't found any engrained opposition saying 'we're against that' (Bill 2011).

Whereas Boulder, Colorado, which is well known for being an extremely liberal community, might be considered an extreme case, this balance of encouraging and discouraging community forces makes Gardiner much more similar to an average small town in America.

### ***Transition Gardiner***

Transition Gardiner is a member of an international movement of Transition Towns (TT). The TT movement was born in Kinsale, Ireland in 2005 and the first TT was started in Totnes, England in 2006. The Transition approach focuses on three key, rapidly approaching issues (climate change, peak oil, and financial instability) and aims to assist communities in becoming more self-reliant and resilient in the face of these challenges. To date there are 420 initiatives in towns around the world, including 114 in the United States (Transition United States 2011). However, given the range of this organization, it has flown mainly under the radar and has been subject to little research. Likely because the movement began in the UK, a few articles have been written focusing on initiatives there (Haxeltine and Seyfang 2009; Curtis 2008; Bailey, Hopkins, and Wilson 2010; A. Smith 2011b; McDonald; A. Smith 2011a) and a few more have been written about initiatives in Australia and Canada (C. Smith 2010; Connors and McDonald 2010; Bardekjian Ambrosii, Sandberg, and Sandberg 2010). Most of these articles have focused on theory and few were empirical. Empirical research into this movement in our country is certainly worthwhile.

In May 2010, Transition Gardiner (TG) began as many TTs do, with a book group, reading *The Transition Handbook*, a book put out by the UK-based Transition Network to help local organizations understand future challenges and learn how to develop effective Transition Initiatives. Since then, TG's list of community events has grown exponentially. As of October 2011, their list of activities includes:

- 14 orientations to Transition with 219 attendees
- 5 speaking engagements with 93 attendees
- 21 workshops with 263 attendees
- 7 book studies with 115 attendees
- 6 movie nights averaging 37 attendees
- 1 work group which met March – June 2011
- 3 home energy audit classes
- 3 work projects
- 3 socials
- 1 forum
- Various other events (Transition Gardiner 2011b)

Compared to most Transition initiatives, this is a very large number of events, particularly for a group in a county of just 100,000 people. Perhaps most interestingly, they have developed a mailing list of 330 people. Many TTs, perhaps especially those in small towns, are composed of a small group of committed activists and few others so it is noteworthy that TG has been able to draw in such a large number of people.

These events and mailings are organized by a group of volunteers which call themselves the “Initiating Group.” The group had also spawned two offshoot groups that I included in my research. The Transition Handbook strongly recommends the development of “working groups” which are intended to focus on a specific issue such as transportation or health. In theory, this would result in one central “initiating group” and several “working groups” focused on food, health, transportation, reskilling, or other elements of the process to develop resilience within the community. It is assumed that these working groups will offer more people the opportunity to participate in the Transition movement because if they are more interested in transportation, for example, they can become part of a group that focuses specifically on that as opposed to having to join a larger group wherein transportation may be mentioned much more rarely. These working groups remain affiliated with the main Transition Town and may work together as regularly or irregularly as they like towards a set of common, shared goals.

In Gardiner however, the two existing offshoot groups are different from those recommended by the Transition Handbook in that they are not based around a topic or issue. One group is geographically based, consisting of members within a subdivision in Gardiner County, which I will call the “Maple Ridge” group. The other group is more thematically based, consisting of members who enjoy taking a similar approach to Transition, including regular work days and workshops at each other’s homes. I will call this group the “Work and Play” group. Both the Maple Ridge and Work and Play groups work on a variety of issues or topics, including food and energy efficiency. Within the interviews, there were also several references to a food and agriculture “working group” which was more similar in style to those proposed by the Transition Handbook. Unfortunately, the food and agriculture work group was discontinued after three months, in July 2011. In referencing “Transition Gardiner,” I will be referencing all of these groups as they are interrelated and associated entities.

Transition Gardiner offers a particularly useful case for studying empowerment in the context of climate change. In the process of designing and conducting this research, it became apparent that very few organizations made their opinions on climate change an explicit and active part of their agenda. Some organizations I considered chose to maintain some distance from climate change due to its politicization. Others saw climate change as a part of their work but primarily as a tertiary benefit, i.e. groups focused on stopping mountain-top coal removal that saw climate change mitigation as a side benefit to the health and safety benefits of their work. Although climate change was not the primary motivator for many of my interviewees (most were more motivated by their concern for peak oil or economic instability or by their love of the work of building resilience through gardening, building community, etc.), it was still an

explicit part of their agenda and a considerable part of the greater concept of an unstable and unknown future scenario.

Also, TG was one of the few organizations I encountered that seemed to embody many of the organizational elements recommended by the empowerment literature. Other organizations I saw were highly top-down and not peer-based. Others were too loose to consider as an organization and still others were so loose that they could truly only be considered to be individuals acting in concert across large geographic scales. The focus of TG on collaboration, learning, and action appeared to hold the greatest likelihood for producing empowering results. As Rappaport states, “When empowering organizations already exist we can learn a great deal about empowerment by collaborating with them to learn about and help them spread their story” (1995, 800). Finally, TG provided a good case study because the group is a work in progress. They are still fairly new and still in the process of “figuring themselves out,” determining their fit within the community, their goals, and their methods. This made for insightful interviews because many of the interviewees could comment on the choices being made and offer well-formed perceptions of the organization’s goals and methods.

Certainly with any case selection, there are drawbacks and limitations as well as benefits gained. In this case, one limitation comes from the group’s focus on three issues instead of on climate change alone. This is not a ‘pure’ climate change case and the results should not be interpreted as such. However, because the associated issues, peak oil and economic instability, cause many of the same barriers to engagement as climate change, it is arguable that the case still has significant merit. Most of the time, when interviewees spoke about the future, it was in the context of this triumvirate of issues that made the future so unmanageable and overwhelming. Many also noted that their participation was in part due to the activities associated with resilience

– gardening, building community, etc. It is likely that this diversity of foci brought in more people than if the group had been solely focused on climate change. Climate change was certainly a key player in that problematic future scenario though and therefore, can be considered to be an active agent in the minds of those involved in TG.

Another limitation is the choice of an organization in a small town as most Americans do not live in towns with populations under 10,000 people. However, the county is a part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and almost 84% of Americans live in MSAs (United States Census Bureau 2011). Although the dynamics of living in a small town are certainly different than the dynamics of life in a large city, it is likely that considering the percentage of the population that live in MSAs, the context provided by Gardiner County would be recognizable to many.

### ***Interviews***

Interviews were the main form of data collection for this research. I visited Gardiner twice, once in April 2011 and again in December 2011. Altogether I interviewed eleven people from the Initiating, Maple Ridge, and Work and Play groups. Initially, I solicited interviews by emailing several people in the TG Initiating Group (IG) after I found their email addresses through a TG newsletter. My solicitation was passed around through several of the group's members and those who were interested contacted me directly. Before I returned in December, I contacted one of my interviewees for assistance. She offered to send my request for interviews out to other members of the IG and other groups. Out of that request, I received the names of several more people who were interested in being interviewed. I met with one interviewee a second time when I returned in December, to catch up on the group's process, to obtain documents for review, and to hear if anything had changed in between our two conversations.

To a certain extent, this interview solicitation method resembles a snowball sampling method although it is somewhat broader because my request was sent to a larger group of people, some of whom then self-selected for participation. I interviewed all of the people who offered to participate.

The interviews were conducted at times and places convenient for the interviewee, often at their homes or at nearby cafes and restaurants. Three of my interviews took place by phone before I returned to Gardiner the second time. Twice I interviewed two people together; both were couples and it was easier for them to be interviewed simultaneously. It also created a focus group atmosphere at times, with each encouraging and prodding the other. All interviews were recorded and lasted between one and two hours. A semi-structured interview guide was used – I brought a long list of topics that I wanted to touch on, but allowed the conversation to go where the interviewee wanted to take it, only bringing us back when we had veered far off course. Finally, the interviews were conducted in a style that created a certain amount of reciprocity with the interviewee. As Portelli has noted, “unlike hard data or archives, people will not talk to you unless you talk to them, will not reveal themselves unless you reveal yourself... you learn nothing if you don't listen” (1997, 52). Portelli has noted that without revealing something about yourself, interviewees will often talk about more superficial ideas and about topics more publicly accessible and acceptable. It has been argued by researchers in many areas of qualitative research that this can be a particularly fruitful method as it empowers the people you are working with by removing the interviewer from the typical place of power in the interview relationship, instead placing the interviewee in the position of power as the “privileged knower” (Nunkoosing 2005, 699).

One potential limitation of the interviews was the narrow demographic representation of the group, although this may be illustrative of the types of individuals who become involved with climate change efforts. All of the interviewees were white; all but one were American-born. I did not ask their ages, but I would assume the youngest were in their late 40s. Six were female and five were male. All had moved to Gardiner from elsewhere, some within the last two years and some within the last 30 years. Four of the interviewees were working and seven had retired. Additionally, some of the interviewees were involved in one of the groups alone (IG, Maple Ridge, or Work and Play) and some were involved in two (the IG and one other group). The breakdown of membership is as follows:

- IG alone: 3;
- Maple Ridge alone: 3;
- Work and Play alone: 2;
- IG and Maple Ridge: 1;
- IG and Work and Play: 2.

The demographics of the group present a limitation for this research. It should be recognized that the group interviewed did not include people of color, younger people, or natives of the area. This is important to note as it creates another layer within the case study as those interviewed are members of a small portion of the community, although they were largely representative of those involved in Transition Gardiner. Pseudonyms have been used to replace real names for all interviewees. All were informed that everything they said would be confidential and that they could choose whether to answer each question.

### ***Participant Observation***

Denzin has defined participant observation as “a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, respondent and informant interviewing, direct participation and observation, and introspection” (2009, 186). All of these forms of observation were utilized

through the research process. These data sources were used to expand my understanding of the process of empowerment and the role of the organization and to triangulate the data received. For document analysis, one of the members of the IG shared with me more than 40 documents. These included minutes from eighteen of the IG's meetings, mission and vision documents that showed how the group's goals had changed over time, advertisements for events, and reflections on events and activities. I also received several documents from the Maple Ridge group, including a survey they had conducted, their mission and vision documents, and advertisements for events. I did not obtain documents from the Work and Play group and I assume that they may not exist because members of the group expressly noted their disinterest in "agendas and minutes and, and task plans and issues lists and all that crazy stuff" (Tony 2011). I also engaged in direct participation and observation by attending a meeting of the IG. These documents and observation experiences provided critical insight into the working of the group and their intent. It also allowed me to triangulate many of the comments received in the interviewees about the way the IG worked and the processes that it utilized.

Finally, I utilized introspection to a large extent in the research process to provide myself with a history of my own insights. After every interview, I completed an interview summary, documenting salient thoughts and observations, new concepts or insights, and questions that had arisen out of the interview. I also kept a journal while I was in the field to document ongoing questions or changes in my own thought process about the data I was receiving. Throughout the research process, from design to writing, I have kept notes in a journal to document the progression of the research and my perspectives on it. All of these elements of introspection function as an audit trail, allowing me to document the research process (Brophy 2009; Carlson 2010; Guba 1989; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins 2010).

These actions also allow me to utilize and benefit from the reflexivity or “critical subjectivity” that is a critical advantage to qualitative research (Carlson 2010; Guba 1989; Lincoln 1995; Nunkoosing 2005; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins 2010). This relates specifically to the more complex level of the audit trail. Reflexivity is something that I used throughout all stages of the research process to check my assumptions and question my own responses. It implies that I am being honest about the data by taking a critical look at the inferences that I am drawing and connections that I am making and asking myself whether another person would make similar inferences and connections. Using reflexivity as a tool for enhancing the trustworthiness of the data is also important because my position as the research instrument means that everything from the research purpose, to the theoretical perspectives underlying the research, to the way data analysis was performed, is imbued with my personal objectives, regardless of attempts that I could have made to rid them of my presence. Instead of viewing this as a weakness of the research, qualitative research seeks to make this aspect of the research explicit, open for and welcoming of questioning and further probing.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis consisted of a thematic content analysis of the interview transcripts, triangulated by data collected through participant observation. I began with a set of codes that emerged from the theory and then utilized the data to reshape the theory-driven themes and to identify emergent themes. Coding utilized both high-level codes for more abstract ideas and low-level codes for more concrete ideas (Madison 2005). For example, a high-level code could be “leadership style” and low-level codes would expand on that by coding segments as “assets-based” or “level of commitment.” A constant comparison method was used to constantly analyze and re-analyze segments of text to ensure proper coding. I also revisited each code to ensure that

the items within it effectively spoke to the same theme, to pull out particularly useful quotes, to search for missing data or information, and to identify relationships between themes and within themes. It is a process that occurs throughout the data analysis process so that codes are constantly reflected upon, questioning whether situations are truly similar or whether new relationships are emerging (Dye 2000).

After I felt confident that I had sufficiently analyzed the data, I emailed a summary of the findings to the interviewees to receive their feedback. All said that the data resonated with their experience and some added some additional comments or feedback on the findings. This process of member checking assisted with ensuring the trustworthiness and validity of the data and also helped my own confidence in the data and my analysis of it. Member checks also work to make the research process an empowering one, as it offers interviewees the opportunity to participate more actively in the research and helps to equalize the power differential that can oftentimes be created within the research environment.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Several key findings emerged out of the data analysis process. They have been organized in a way that attempts to answer the research questions by showcasing both the individual process and the organizational strategies at the same time. This weaving of the two research questions is necessary due to the interconnectedness of the two units of analysis. The findings are grouped into six themes: Safe Space; Structure; Awareness-Raising and Capacity-Building; Outreach and Bridging; Climate Change; and Empowerment. The relationships between these themes can be seen in my summary of the process of empowerment I saw in this context:

Empowerment can occur in environments where individuals who are aware and concerned have an opportunity to interact with a small, localized group of people in a safe space where they can develop community, imagine a more positive future outlook, collaboratively develop goals, create clear, actionable projects, have opportunities to learn more, and gain additional skills and knowledge, and hear stories of success that offer hope.

In the tradition of qualitative research, I have included as many quotes as possible to allow the data to speak for itself. This also allows the reader to analyze the data with me and to draw their own conclusions as necessary.

### *Safe Space*

Perhaps the most important finding that emerged from the data was the importance that several people placed on having a safe space in which to talk about complicated, value-ridden ideas like climate change. This is a space where creativity and positivity about various future options is possible and encouraged. It is a space for people to build relationships, network, and community. Every interviewee talked about this space in one way or another and all spoke to its critical importance in encouraging them to stay involved. This concept of a “safe space” is broken down into several subthemes.

### *Space to be Emotional*

Many people talked about the importance of having a space where they could let loose their emotions and talk about the difficult and challenging things they needed to talk about. This group provided that space where people could rant when they needed to and know that they would still be welcome.

There needs to be an opportunity for people to talk about all this stuff that's come up and scream and shout and you know, do all that response that's very necessary (Sue 2011).

That came up in some of the book groups - they would come back in and say, "we tried to have this conversation over our dinner, at a dinner party and a spouse would say, you've got to quit talking about it, or people would simply say it's too depressing, can we change the subject?" So... it was depressing them because they haven't said, "we're going to look at it"... I think it gave people the chance to actually state their fears and their griefs (Marie 2011a).

### *Space to Build Relationships*

This finding relates to the capacity of the group to allow individuals to build relationships with one another. Some commented on the need for relationships with others to continue motivation.

You're going to go crazy trying to, uh, sort of cope with this alone. It's very... we can't do it as individuals (Marie 2011a).

It's pretty hard to do transition on your own, with two people... to make the life changes and grow the food (Donna 2011).

Some talked about the benefits of these relationships in helping to build trust and maintain optimism about the future.

I think it's important to allow and create the venue for people to come and... you know, it's all very well saying build trust, but how do you build trust, well you only build trust by actually having a relationship with people, you know (Linda 2011).

Annie: it's uh, like a, rising tide lifts all boats- Marie: And that metaphor's been used a lot, because if I've gotta be in this, in this storm, I wanna be in a boat with people who share, who um, support - who are compassionate towards people who might not even be

in a boat, (laughs) you know, but there will be, but there will be hard choices. I mean huge, hugely hard choices (Marie 2011a).

These relationships were strong and often were the link that kept people from leaving the group as their lives became busy with other things.

Well one of the things that this group did that I thought we did well at the very beginning... we didn't know each other, I mean, we, some of us knew each other, some were total strangers to one another, and the group did do some, um, going to other peoples' homes and sitting there, watching one of the movies together instead of offering it as a program out there, we did meals together... we tried some of the workshops on one another first before then we offered it to the community and... I will say personally that I've stuck with the group longer than I might have... and it's because of the personal relationships that we developed. I mean, I may be frustrated if they're disagreeing with what - you know, what, a particular way in which we're approaching something but I care for these people and... I'm not gonna walk out on them like I might if we had not developed those kind of bonds, I mean, where we can say things to each other and, and not get offended, you know. I remember one of our members at one meeting finally just, just, you know, lost it, and he got through saying it and he said, uh, "Well now you've seen the worst side of me," and Sue... said, "and did it - and did we leave?" (laughs) (Marie 2011a)

Those personal relationships and getting to know each other in that way has allowed me, um, well there are a couple times I've thought, well my work is too heavy for me to spend the time on tra- with the community group, and then I would say, I'm not gonna leave em right now, you know? it's, it's uh, there's something important - not only the climate change but there's something important about how we come together (Marie 2011a).

### *Space to Find Community*

In addition to using the group to build relationships, many referenced using the group as a surrogate community, particularly if their own community was not open to talking about these issues. Perhaps more importantly, being a part of this community gives participants the sense that they are not alone, that they are part of a bigger group of people working to address these issues. They use this community for emotional and moral support and as a buoy when it becomes difficult to handle the depressing nature of the issues.

I guess just having honest conversations, um, uh, finding people that, um, that you... uh that you resonate, that, that resonate with your ideas and... I don't know, just the fact that, I think people have these concerns but they may not always have a place where they

can safely talk about them, uh, I know at a, a number of the meetings that we've had and movies that we've shown, people come up afterwards and say, "gosh, I'm so glad to know that there's other people here that are concerned about this or that think about this because in my neighborhood there's nobody or in my, in my, uh... in my family there's nobody else that, that's talking about these things," so that I think is probably the most valuable. (Ethan 2011).

I know I have felt this way and, other people have vocalized it, that having something beyond an occasional party or social event really has made a difference in the relationships and also, I mean, people hate missing the meetings, even though, as one who's very um, task-oriented, I'm interested in getting something done, because I see them all the time anyway, it's not like I've never seen them, so we come together and some of the members start, you know, going off over here on their tangent or over there and off subject and carrying on, I get frustrated and then I have to remember, for some of them, right now, this might be as much about socializing and community as it is about deciding what the next task is, but people, my point is, that people all, a lot of people have said this really means a lot to me to have this group and know that we're thinking about these things together (Noah 2011).

I think maybe just the camaraderie and getting together, um, and the fact that it's, um, I don't know, there's a commonality there, uh, people want to be more independent and, and, be able to grow more of their own food and to use less energy and so there's, there's some commonality there that um, and, you know the people are just really nice, giving folks and so I guess there's some resonance, resonating going on there, um... I don't know is there, there's something else there that I can't put my finger on, I can't put my finger on. I don't know what it is (Ethan 2011).

There is a comfort that comes in just knowing that there's all these people who see this as a problem... That's, that's probably the hardest part for me here, where these groups do have a high value is the, you're not alone... because, I get a sense, um... that the community's not on board... So, the group's provided an important resource in that way to keep us psychologically... engaged and buoyed up and resilient... (Noah 2011).

### *Space to Build a Network*

Some people spoke about the sense of community that the group created from a more survivalist, networked perspective, i.e. if, or when, things began to change in the future, they could feel comforted by the fact that they had people in their neighborhoods or elsewhere in their community they could count on for meals or shared transportation or shared garden space, etc.

I really value and appreciate very much what I see going on in the Work and Play group where people are doing a lot of just work days for one another and it's not, it's not a form of um... well it's not barter and it's also not banking the hours, it's just that there's a group of people who have gotten to know each other well enough that if someone needs,

will put out an email and say I could use some help for four hours making a trail or bushwhacking some woods or painting a piece of property or clearing a bank and if you come we'll have, we'll have lunch for you, and... out of twenty or twenty-five people at any given time, five or ten people show up and it's not just the project, it's the fellowship. It's the sense of, uh, shared work is light. So I would love to see more of that just sort of spring from the Transition movement. Self-organized, but people really feeling like, oh okay, right here in this neighborhood, if I needed help, I've got five people I could call to come work for two hours. And, and that if I'm available, I'm there when they call. But nobody's keeping track and nobody's making sure people don't get more than they deserve. It's sort of like, out of abundance I give and out of my need I ask (Marie 2011b).

Gathering community together is, is big for me because what I'm doing is, is um, piling up an infrastructure that we can count on each other, that we can get on the phone or, bicycle down the street or whatever it takes to say, you know, um, we're in tight time (Tony 2011).

Well I think all these sort of activities we get involved in, because we, uh, workshops are offered out, to everybody, even if they're not part of transition... kind of thing, that brings people together, so you know, it's really making the neighborhood really functioning more like a true little community and I think that's probably a real key to resiliency is, is, is not being in the situation we don't even know the person one house over, you know, everybody at least knows each other or, they may not share all the same goals (David 2011).

### *Space to be Positive and Creative*

This finding represents an important element of the Transition movement that is not seen in many other movements: the focus on positivity. Members of TG also related this to having the space to be creative and to consider better future possibilities within this safe space. In a response received during member checking, one participant effectively stated this idea as follows: "One of the important ideas for me is the thought that maybe a lifestyle less dependent on oil could actually be better! More community based, healthier, and happier. The idea being that people need people and the more connected we are to each other the better we feel!" (Linda 2012).

If we only concentrate on the doom and gloom, I feel like we'll lose our objective and lose the interest of people who will say, I give up, I can't do anything about it anyway, um, which is certainly not what we're about (Sue 2011).

If you just present people, this is global warming, this is climate change, it's gonna kill everything, we're all gonna die, uh, you either just get totally depressed and despondent because there's nothing I can do or you can say well, I'm gonna go get drunk for the next five years... and those are the two logical reactions to that type of message and that's why I portray transition as being a positive response instead being a negative, fear-based response which is what all the other responses are. And a negative fear-based message leads to depression and inaction and a positive message, uh, can lead to people seeing small steps lead to small success, and you build community and relationships and we're gonna get out of this, these situations that we're in, uh, as, by communities, rebuilding community and rebuilding the bonds between people. And transition knows that so um, I see that it can help people get past the depressed, uh, paralyzed state that typically people get into when they're faced with overwhelming huge issues that appear to be something they can't have any impact on (Bill 2011).

I think, there's several things that came out of that first book group, um, one was that we all started sharing stories and started sharing ideas about how we could, uh, grow more of our own food, uh, power down, uh, our electrical use, um, you know, drive less, uh, really started doing some dreaming about what could be (Ethan 2011).

I guess just being, just being open, and inviting and not, you know, having a, a set agenda that, the idea that everybody has, has things that they can contribute and uh, and you know, it's... a philosophical kind of approach that... no one of us has, uh, a lock on good ideas and the more we share ideas, like, you, you know, you may say something that would stimulate me to say something else that would stimulate somebody else to think about something that happened to them, you know, a year ago or a conversation that they had with somebody and, so that whole creativity is, I think, um... uh, tied in with the idea of sharing, sharing ideas and sharing fears and sharing, uh, other experiences, yeah. It's just that whole, the whole thing that we are a lot smarter as a group than we are as individuals (Ethan 2011).

Dance - let's just quit talking about this and dance for the next thirty minutes, you know, in other words, if you get so heavy and... it's, it's a piece of "let's celebrate life," you know, we can't control it. We can just be present to it and do what we think we can do, but let's also celebrate that we are alive for whatever time we have - that living in the moment, that mindfulness piece that comes out of the Buddhist tradition (Marie 2011a).

There's this visioning process you do in the Transition movement, I mean, we had a couple great people who, something - I took it seriously you know, but some of them just went into this mad - they activate the imaginations of people. They activate the imaginations of people around them, and it's great to have a few of those people like that involved in this movement... Or in any kind of real heavy change (Marie 2011a).

I think there are some people who are cynical, but I think there are a lot of people that care deeply but... it's a self-preservation kind of thing because it's, it's too big and overwhelming... I could not stay sustained without people who I can have these conversations with. I have a dear friend... and one thing she is adamant about is that even when we're dealing with very difficult issues, we *play*. That we don't forget to

live... while we're trying to make these changes, so I think that helps balance it (Marie 2011a).

The uh, teaching - not teaching, that sounds very condescending and I don't mean it like that, but, uh, helping raise the community's awareness, uh, not only what the future may bring but also what positive things can be done in the face of that, is the whole purpose of Transition. So it's not from a doom and gloom standpoint that transition moves. It is from a positive change standpoint (Sue 2011).

These various elements of the type of space that is created by the group are critical to the level and maintenance of engagement. It helped people to get involved and it helped them to stay involved.

### ***Structure***

The group does not maintain much structure – it is not a 501(c)3; they do not have an official “board;” they do not have many rules. This sometimes creates complex challenges in organizing but is primarily viewed by participants as a benefit in helping them reach their goals. Several elements further describe the structure of the organization and the benefits and challenges that go along with that structure.

### ***Collaborative Space***

Every interviewee mentioned the group's focus on consensus-based organizing. Collaboration is key, along with the sense that “no one holds the lock on good ideas.” This overall belief about their organizational culture is highlighted in one of the group's guiding documents, *Guidelines for Self-Governance of the Initiating Group*, which identifies the respectful, positive intent of the relationships, the honest, dialogic nature of the group, the focus on shared leadership, and the focus on inclusiveness and consensus-based decision-making (Transition Gardiner 2011a). No quotes focus exclusively on the consensus-based decision-making model although it has been implicitly noted in many of the quotes from other themes,

particularly those in the “Safe Space” theme. However, it is clear from the group’s minutes and from my observation of the group that this type of culture exists in reality and is held to be important by the group’s members.

### *Ego*

I was struck by the altruistic nature of the group when I visited both times. From the way many of the interviewees spoke about the group and its work, it was clear that their focus was on bettering the community and helping it to be more resilient in the face of future change. There was very little talk of “us and them;” instead, interviewees were respectful and welcoming of others. This is a philosophy that underlies many of the choices the group makes about the structure of the organization.

You know, something like this, the greatest success would be that it becomes mainstream... And that people don’t even have to know where it came from. That’s the difference between an organization and something that’s grassroots, is that at some point you don’t even want to have to claim the credit for it as long as you see it happening (Sue 2011).

Well, um, with um, the Transitions movement, it is, it is about the community, it’s not about Transitions group, it’s not about individuals, it really is truly the community, the whole premise being that we have to have a sustainable and resilient community to, to make it all work (Sue 2011).

We didn’t all of a sudden go into this ego mode... and I have to constantly, you know, just keep reminding myself that I may have a - I may be able to offer something... but I had to get away from “well, I have the right way to do it” (Marie 2011a).

I definitely think everybody on the group has gone through easier and harder times with the group, but the thing that just is, is astounding is the fact that, you know, people are willing, for the most part, to get over their personalities, to, you know, and so I think that, that passion and that desire, uh, for us to live in a more robust and resilient community, and more unified, uh, you know, is, um, that’s, that’s very cool. You know? Um... because we are quite a diverse group of people (Linda 2011)

### *Asset-Based*

As opposed to being focused on their needs and what was lacking within the group, interviewees spoke repeatedly about the assets they have within their membership. This relates closely to the finding on creating space for positivity. They carry their positivity over into a great appreciation for each other even if they struggle to get along from time to time. This focus on assets creates an environment in which a structure with one leader and several staff is highly undesirable as it would fail to take advantage of the diversity of talents within the group.

People, people have their own areas that they're more interested in, you know, which is pretty normal, and then people have their own, sort of set of talents, that they kind of bring, too (Bill 2011).

Everybody has their different talents and things that they share. Some are very organized and good at being the master keeper of the email list, all of our contacts, some are good at writing articles for our newsletter that is distributed electronically, um, others are good at, uh, teaching people how to make sauerkraut (Sharon 2011).

### *Strength from Non-Structure*

Several people spoke to the point that, although the lack of structure can be challenging, it is also an asset. It gives them the flexibility over time to respond to the changing needs of the group or the community. Its bottom-up nature is empowering for the participants because they believe they play important roles. They expressed the sense that the lack of structure created a more creative environment and allowed for the development of better ideas. Many also related their distaste for structure to their past experiences – several had worked for most of their lives in highly structured environments and relished the freedom offered by the non-structure of the group.

The non-structure that we have which is basically just a group of citizens that meet, is the best description you could give of it, gives us total flexibility. As soon as we set up a formal structure in place by either incorporating as a non-profit or um, some other way, then um, you gotta follow some rules and guidelines wherever you set up because the only guidelines we've set up are how we handle our meetings and work with each other,

such as, we make decisions by consensus and meet every two weeks and we've got eight or ten rules like that, nothing that says we can do this or can't do that, so that, I guess it's, we don't have anything against that, it's just nobody has felt the need to formalize our organization yet (Bill 2011).

That's one of the things that's different about the Transition movement, is... it's very much not a top-down approach where somebody's in charge and they delegate to somebody else. It's uh, and so, the IG has purposefully uh, not, tried not to be too organized (laughs) which sounds kind of crazy, but, um, and, we've tried, we've struggled... in that we have lots of good ideas of things to do and how to do things and not enough energy to do everything so we've had to, we've had a scattered approach which is wonderful for creativity and getting your juices flowing and everything, but not so good so far as accomplishing things, so on the IG we just recently did some work to kind of pare down, um, what we're trying to take on, and we've gone from having, you know, twenty or thirty different ideas for projects down to having basically three, um, three goal areas, so we've kind of pared things down to make it a little bit more doable (Ethan 2011).

If we give it too many um, too much structure and too much limitation then, then the idea might not be as, might not be as abundant, you know, in the result. Hard to say (Tony 2011).

Most of the people are very, um, uh... innovative, sensitive, um, out of the box a little bit, not liking to be in the confines of, of um, structure, so that the whole group is kind of, uh, has a, kind of a heartbeat of its own (Donna 2011).

We have a federal ID number, we have a bank account, but we weren't gonna go to the full, at least this, at this point in time, when we were first starting it, we didn't want our energy to be redirected into forming a non-profit organization with all of that - I've done enough of those, and, affiliating with some... uh, established groups around town also didn't make, put us in competition with them (Marie 2011a).

### *Progress*

This lack of structure was also evidenced by the way they talked about the progress they have made and the way that progress has emerged.

I'll never forget the first conversation I had with Bill and I asked him, you know, what, what did he think about the group and how was it all going and he said, "well, you know," he said, "I think it's really pretty interesting, you know, we all talk about a lot of stuff, we never really pin anything down. Nothing, everything all just seems to be rather vague and it sort of all floats around and yet, absolutely miraculously, things seem to happen" and that was what he said to me (Linda 2011).

What's exciting for me is to say what's happening and then we can't see how A ended up at C but we got C, so let's, let's celebrate it. Because it's bubbling up everywhere (Marie 2011a).

### *Challenges with Lack of Structure*

Along with mentioning the benefits of this “non-structure,” many participants noted the difficulty of operating with very little structure. Particularly, many noted the difficulty of maintaining the balance between flexibility and rigidity in attempting to grow and change. It created conflict within the group at times and has caused them to re-evaluate their goals and strategies several times.

I think it could get better. I think it could be a little bit clearer, perhaps, but, again, you know, it's very difficult to get that kind of clarity without sort of getting a lot of rigidity (Linda 2011).

The group meetings didn't really have a lot of structure and so... they became quite frustrating because everybody was just talking and throwing in ideas and, in, you know, we're just chasing round and round and round and... I think the frustration sort of hit a bit of a peak and I think people were like, “you know what? This is just not working really,” and so it took us then... probably another four months and that's what we've kind of been doing over the summer, just kind of hashing out some kind of a structure, some kind of a, um, a foundation to have the meetings sort of rest on and be able to kind of, build, and... it's quite hard. It's really quite hard (Linda 2011).

### *Challenges with Planning and Organizational Culture*

Planning, in particular, has been a difficult point as many of the people involved are disinterested in traditional planning and organizational methods of goal development. The group has had to work to develop their own methods and their own, new way of organizing which has been a challenge. This relates as well to the past experiences of many of the participants – several noted that they were tired of or bored by traditional planning practices such as group visioning, scenario planning, and other organizational planning methods.

Well I think one of the things is that, you know, this hasn't really been done so there's no road map, so that makes it kind of hard... uh, two, that, you know, people, um, people don't want to do things the old way, you know, I think we're all quite bored to death with

the old leadership role, however when you don't have any leadership then you're all just like milling around in a field, nobody gets anywhere. So it's like, trying to find the, the balance with that (Linda 2011).

I've been in the non-profit world where there's been a lot of competition but there's something about, also, some of the Transition movement being sort of a, grassroots that's not about setting up another non-profit and sustaining it and setting up an infrastructure that we hope to make last for 50 years, so when you get that out of the way, it's a matter of how do we approach these challenges in a, a whole new way of thinking that we don't even know how to move into yet, and so sometimes we get back into the old models, uh, you know, of strategic planning, and then sometimes we think, no, where's the permaculture piece? So it's, it's a real struggle because we have to unlearn or divest - I have to divest myself of what I earned my money in for 25 years as a career, to be able to relate to people differently and to... and to relearn things that were my natural inheritance... (Marie 2011a).

### *Challenges with Size and Viability*

A critical element with any organization is ongoing viability of the group. Because this group is entirely volunteer managed, there are challenges with member replacement and viability over time as members have things that come up in their lives and require them to retire from the group. This was something that the group was actively struggling with while I was working with them. There were disagreements within the group about next steps in recruiting new members, particularly for the Initiating Group (IG).

You know, um, if someone was really able to come in and participate and do something fabulous, well, well great, but, you know, if they were the right person, that would, that would fine, but, um, I think we need people out in the community who are more, sort of, hands on and willing to really coordinate and step up and do stuff (Linda 2011).

I think the group needs four, maybe four or five new people to come in to breathe some new energy, new life, some new ideas and take it on the next step (Marie 2011b).

The only thing I've learned from it is to be slow and conservative about adding people to a group. And the problem with that is, um, people's lives get busy, people's lives change, they move, they get divorced, they get involved in something else so if you've got an activity, that, in this case has been going on for about eighteen months in just Gardiner, um, people start dropping off for various reasons and if you don't have new blood coming on, suddenly sitting there with three or four, looking at each other saying "gee..." What you need is to be bringing new people in but at the same time, you need to make sure they're going to be compatible in their personality interacting style as well as in the way they look at things. At the same time you have to make sure that you have a

diversity of outlooks so it's a real, um, yin-yang type of dilemma and it has no clear-cut answer, in my experience (Bill 2011).

It's a little frustrating that you have people say, "yeah, yeah, we really need to do that" and they don't want to step up and put in the time or they don't have the time, you know some people are working, they have families, you know, other pulls on their, on their time so... (Ethan 2011).

There's a caveat, in uh, because we're small... we've had a couple of families who have had, who are active members, have had family situations or have something happen that has meant that they haven't been able to participate in a while and so trying to build up the energy to do something constructive beyond the things I've told you about, um, sometimes can be a challenge (Noah 2011).

Although there were significant challenges with the chosen structure of the organization, most participants felt strongly that they preferred the non-structure approach to a more structured one. While it sometimes caused internal conflict, iterative planning processes, and other frustrations, they appreciated the flexibility and creativity it offered and the feeling of the space it created, with an asset-based focus on community benefit.

### ***Awareness-Raising and Capacity-Building***

Transition Gardiner provides individuals with knowledge about the issue of climate change and problems that lay ahead and the skills, both soft, like leadership, and hard, like gardening, that are needed to become more resilient. Interviewees noted the importance of information in becoming engaged and in feeling like they have the tools to make change. Some individuals entered TG with significant amounts of knowledge about climate change, peak oil, or economic instability, while others had relatively little beginning knowledge. Many mentioned the skills and knowledge they had gained though, and related its importance either explicitly or implicitly.

I've learned a lot more about, um, oil shortages, peak oil, um, than I knew before, and there's so much to know that - about that, that it's just quite, uh, unbelievable (Sue 2011).

We didn't do as good a job as you would do if you were used to running workshops and facilitating things like that. But you know, I'm getting better and you've got to start somewhere right? So, you know, it's all kind of part of just, you know, learning... and I've just started to do that so that feels really good actually (Linda 2011).

Some of that was sort of underway but the Transition movement put it in the perspective I needed. It's sort of like, the garden had been started a couple of years ago because I love to weed and then all of a sudden, it was like, what if we really had to produce our food off it? If it wasn't a hobby? So we tried to be much more intentional (Marie 2011).

I would say a great part of this group which I really didn't talk about is the knowledge that we've shared. And I don't mean left-brained, um, you know... uh, information, but it's been teaching knowledge, skill knowledge, knowingness of, of, uh, kind of having a knowingness of how things might be, how things could be, um, we have very practical people and we have people that are kind of looking at the big picture (Tony 2011).

### *Stories of Success*

Part of the knowledge gained came from "stories of success," stories from people within their group or from other groups across the country or around the world who had successfully become more resilient. It seems fitting that in a field that few have entered so far and in a community setting relatively detached from other areas, stories of success would be particularly helpful.

You can see people and be involved with people that are, that have become more resilient and you see what, you know, if you get people to take a few small actions and see the results from it, whatever it may be, then they can start taking more actions (Marie 2011a).

There was this wonderful article about Detroit taking all these vacant lots that, these dilapidated buildings, and just totally said "okay, let's do all these urban gardens," I mean... That, that's what makes me hopeful, is things like that (Marie 2011b).

The book studies are really inspiring, uh, reading this book and reading about what's happened in other parts of the world are inspiring (Sharon 2011).

### *Outreach and Bridging*

Many community organizing and outreach groups face the challenge of how to reach "beyond the choir" but this group felt both a critical urgency associated with this task due to the pressing nature of climate change, peak oil, and economic instability, and a simultaneous lack of

understanding about how to do so. With the knowledge and capacity that the participants were gaining, they felt a distinct need to share that knowledge and capacity with a greater group of people. While I was working with the group, they were struggling with how to engage more individuals and organizations and actively developing ideas about how that could be done.

### *Importance of Bridging*

The group saw this act of conducting bridging work and outreach as a highly necessary task, both for the ongoing viability of the organization and to increase their capacity to develop resilience within the community. Many interviewees noted the importance of this work, even while they may have had difficulty determining how best to do it.

How do we reach the people who are in the middle of that bell-shaped curve who haven't come out strongly denying the existence who could be persuaded if we made the effort? That's what I'd like to see us work on... At some point you've gotta go beyond the groups you're dealing with because you're talking to the choir, so are you reaching out to churches, are you working with the school system, are you working with public officials? Are you working with the business community? (Noah 2011).

To start to think that... that would be more valuable work in the long run, rather than focused on more rain barrels or whatever the next small thing is. Don't stop doing that but let's think, how can we make a bigger contribution? And, and if it would be to reach these other communities and start to educate and make them aware and get them empowered, how can we find them and maybe it's helping, I'm just making this up, maybe it's helping the initiating group to have more events at the library more frequently, in different parts of the community (Noah 2011).

If there's one thing I've learned it's you can't force people to do this work. You can invite them into it. And if you do require it or make sure they go over it, sometimes they will put up, again, huge resistance but if you invite them into it, and let, and there's a readiness level for when people are ready to deal with it, then what comes out on the other side has much greater, uh, um, energy (Marie 2011b).

What we're hoping in this group, and it feels like it's changing, is to have, um, all ages, I mean my vision is to see children and, um, you know my son is 30, but to have, not just people who are, um, gray-haired and retired, but to have the whole community (Donna 2011).

### *Challenge of Bridging*

The quotes in this finding highlight the group's struggles to reach out to those other individuals and groups they had not yet reached. Their comments make visible the physical difficulty of engagement. They reference two separate occasions when the group has attempted to do outreach: one was a meeting held in November 2011 when they invited the public to a meeting to learn about TG and volunteer to work on specific issues; the second is the "food and agriculture working group" which existed from May to June 2011. With both of these experiences, their frustration is palpable. As is experienced by many small advocacy organizations, the challenge of outreach and engagement is one of the most difficult to overcome.

We got some people who were very specific, they would say, you know, "if you have a specific event, I have the capability of going out and putting up posters all around town" and so, that was, you know, very, that was great, that was very specific, very targeted, um, you know, some other people would say, "well, you know, I'd like to work on Transportation" but not specifying how they'd want to work on Transportation or, uh, what aspect of Transportation they would want to work on so we got everything from very specific to very general sort of ideas on how people wanted to plug in and I would have rather have had, uh, more specifics and less, less general stuff (Ethan 2011).

Getting them then to actually do something about it, um, is more difficult, because people are used to hearing things in certain ways, uh, they have their own busy lives with responsibilities and so this is like, uh, another thing that is on top of everything and, and so it's difficult to get people to change their lifestyles to... to try to accomplish some of the things that Transition's trying to do. We've gotta somehow figure out how to integrate the Transition movement with peoples' everyday life (Ethan 2011).

The work group that did get off the ground had like, 25 people or something, really good, like really interested. Most people just wanted to go off and do their own thing. Most people wanted to, to garden, you know? Nobody was really interested in collecting data which is really what the food group needs to be doing. Um... so yeah, we just didn't really know how to hold it. We didn't know what to do with it. We didn't know how to structure it (Linda 2011).

What I think happened with that [food and agriculture working group], um, part of it was, sort of, lack of focus you know, when you get a bunch of, um, smart, active people together they have tons of ideas and, and that's great but that also can spread out your energy so much that nothing gets done, uh, and I think that was part of the problem is

that, that work group didn't have a specific charge, a specific direction, um, and then the other thing is that, uh, a couple of the people who were real gung-ho with starting the group, um, had some other things come up in their lives that they had to take care of so they went off of the work group and the people that were left didn't have the energy or the time or the interest to kind of keep things going (Ethan 2011).

### *How to do it?*

Several interviewees expressed thoughts or ideas about how bridging might occur – what environments or information might be more engaging than others. During the member checks, I received additional feedback that the group has continued to work on this question and has begun some new projects in an attempt to engage new members. The first quote below comes from that member check.

We are currently involved in several projects that have been or should be fruitful in getting our message out and giving people skills to be more self-sufficient. These include a 4 day school on planting and maintaining a fruit orchard and grafting and a public forum on alternative transportation, We are doing an Earth Day tree planting at three locations in the city and county, and are pursuing a partnership with the True Nature Country Fair that will be in September and will be offering many reskilling opportunities. We are continuing with our monthly movie/engagement night and have scheduled quarterly socials to bring in more folk for fun activities (Ethan 2012).

Some spoke to the importance of being very specific and strategic with their outreach, targeting certain segments of the population or certain obvious partners. Others responded to past efforts and spoke to the need to be more directive with future efforts and future volunteers.

I think we would rethink what we're doing and try to be more strategic and more outwardly focused. I don't know what form that would take but that would be the conversation I would want us to have is, how can we do something larger that has more impact?... I'm assuming, I don't know this, but I'm assuming that some of these people, maybe even many of them, are active in their church. There's a community of people. Are there groups that we could, are there other groups that you belong to that are established that we could go and talk to? (Noah 2011)

I think we would probably get [a future work group] to agree to write a um, a charter or some kind of sort of, more specific purpose and try to focus the energy based on how much time and, and input people had, so instead of trying to do everything to address all the food and agriculture concerns that people had, maybe pick out a project, maybe pick out a couple of things to get started on, um, and sort of build the momentum that way

instead of the shotgun approach where you have all these great ideas and, um, and nothing ends up actually happening (Ethan 2011).

Several referenced that developing clear, actionable projects was very important to the group, both from the perspective of feeling effective as an organization and as a potential way to bridge differences. One specific aspect they spoke to was the potential for a specific project to be less perspective-driven and more work-driven. Therefore, it could put the group in contact with others with whom they might disagree. For example, someone may not agree about climate change, but they might still want to help build a new community garden. The group struggled to develop these, but viewed them as being key.

I would hope that there really would become, uh, that there would be some, um, and this may be in the form of a demonstration project or it may be in the form of some, some other thing that will happen, but, but, some real concrete changes will start happening on, uh, on a small scale, um... in the community that attracts attention of people outside those who identify with Transition (Ethan 2011).

Hands-on projects aren't so much about belief systems. They're about, and, can break through, or you can, you can be in a room with a person who doesn't agree with you if you have a relationship that's grounded in something mutual like that (Brenda 2011).

And having little conversations, you know, you're sitting there at 7:30 in the morning, you know, when it's not too hot in the sun, and, and weeding, and, you're cheek by jowl with somebody who you never really ever see around because, you know, they're younger, they've got kids, they've got a job, you know, whatnot, but they wanted to work in the garden (Brenda 2011).

Other members spoke to the importance of bridging, but seemed to hope that it would just happen, that people would be drawn to the work of the group because of its innate importance.

I hope it will continue to attract new people so that the energy will grow, and by whatever hook or crook that can happen. (Marie 2011b).

Unless there's a catastrophe, you know, unless we, we are brought together by some earth change or something happens, um, it's gonna be a challenge to create the neighborhood... and the only sense of neighborhood we have had, um, was a community watch meeting right here, two years ago around a neighbor who was a high-risk, uh, you know, robber. So we got together out of, uh, a disaster, you know, out of a local dilemma... and you can't push community. It has to be contagious and it has to attract you or have a, have a need, in my, in my belief (Donna 2011).

Certainly it will be a while before even a small minority of people in Gardiner will know about what we're doing, but you know, getting more things in the newspaper, um, hopefully will help, and advertising our forums and our movies and our book study groups, all of those things will gradually spread the word to more people (Bill 2011).

We're hoping that the message, the real message of transition, about climate change and peak oil starts to come through and they see something that relates to their life, which is not about light bulbs or driving a Prius or any of that. It's something that affects them, we're sort of co-opting. Does that make any sense? It's a long term strategy, but it's a way, in our view, to, to involve first with something that's meaningful and then educate along the way (Noah 2011).

I think the philosophy behind this group anyway, is that... people will be converted by just seeing what some of us are doing, and say, "geez, hey, not a bad idea," or "we could try this, maybe we could grow some more food instead of flowers in the yard," or maybe, uh, "geez, I'd like to have a rain barrel too, you know, because my water bill has gone up through the ceiling, I could save a lot of money with that," so, it's those kinds of little things that might bring about change (David 2011).

We've had problems getting volunteers and it's probably because we haven't presented it in the right way, and structured it in the right way and asked in the right way. Actually, that's a little bit of an unanswered question as to why we've not been able to attract volunteers. We've been kind of tracking around that for a while (Ethan 2011).

In all of these quotes, the importance of outreach and bridging is visible. Simultaneously, it is clear that the group is struggling to understand the best path forward to achieve those goals. This difficulty might be typical for this kind of work, but it is an important challenge nonetheless.

### ***Perception of Climate Change***

Interviewees raised their perceptions of climate change and other coming changes (peak oil and economic instability) both explicitly and implicitly in conversation. Their perceptions were complicated and difficult to evaluate. It appeared that there were two main types of perceptions: those who saw it as incredibly urgent and pressing and were highly alarmed at what the future might hold and those who saw it as urgent but uncontrollable. Those who saw climate change as urgent and pressing wanted the group to be doing more to expand their impact on the greater issue of climate change, whereas those in the second group perceived their efficacy at

impacting climate change as being low and therefore focused more on resilience. Several comments related to the focus on resilience appear above in other themes and in the following section; selected comments from those who see climate change as being more urgent are offered here.

Some people... don't have a sense of, of impending doom, the way I do... I have a great sense of urgency, a great sense of concern... and the others in the group... they've read the book... and now we're planting edibles in the yard and now we have a rain barrel and that's all fine. They don't necessarily see, or wring their hands about this out here (Noah 2011).

I frankly wish that I had more capacity to say, yeah I know the floods in Pakistan, I know the tornadoes in Joplin, MO and I know and I know and I know *and*, but see for me, I see time slipping away very quickly, and eight years of the Bush administration, the frustrations that the current president's gone through, Copenhagen, wherever else they met, and now Durban and so there's something in 2020, oh wonderful, I'm so energized by that. And meanwhile, more and more extreme weather events every year, more and more melting, more and more beetle infestations in higher altitudes, more and more of all of this... it just informs your worldview, it's what you have (Noah 2011).

### *Resilience*

Those who desired a focus on resilience held the local focus of the group and the small scale of the actions to be very important. The *Transition Gardiner Road Map* makes this focus clear in the group's mission statement:

To raise awareness among Gardiner area citizens about the reality of peak oil, climate change, and economic instability and create a re-localized economy, food systems, and an energy descent plan through community collaboration and creativity (Transition Gardiner 2011c, 1).

This mission statement offers insight into the group's vision for resilience, which is also encouraged by the many participants who are disenfranchised by the idea of attempting to create change at higher levels of society (regional, national, international, etc.). Many also argued against the idea of trying to work with local government, instead choosing to focus on grassroots opportunities within the community and individual scales. As one participant noted during member checks, "If you are going to have a grassroots effort, that is where your energy needs to

go. Awareness and advocacy for global changes is still there, but the emphasis on local changes is viewed as just as important and more feasible.” The comments below show how the interviewees defined resilience and the perceived benefits of this localized focus on resilience.

I just like this idea of resilience, because things are happening and they're not all good. Climate change is breathing down our necks, uh, the economy has gone pffft and doesn't seem to be coming back and god only knows, uh, what's down the road so it's a nice idea to think of well, maybe we could survive all this somehow as a community, maybe better than if we were just individuals out there (Bill 2011).

One of the things that we've figured out is that you can, you can do things personally, you can come up with your own, um, your own plans for how you're gonna use less energy and drive less and be more efficient in your heating of your house and grow more of your own food, sort of a personal energy descent plan, um, and there's some people that have done that, and um, you know that's a definite, uh, a positive step in that direction (Ethan 2011).

My personal goal is to... have a, uh, a resilient lifestyle in a resilient environment that can tolerate whatever happens, I mean, everybody's- I refuse to live in fear, but I also want to hedge my bets that, you know, I can get water down in the stream, we have a good filter system and, without electricity... we have heat, we have, we have gas heat, we don't have a wood stove (Tony 2011).

Some participants spoke to the point that many of the kinds of tasks that TG works on, such as local food and energy efficiency, will create a better life regardless of whether any large future shifts happen or not. This increased their confidence in the work of resilience because it seems to be a win-win move.

Well uh, what's kind of interesting to me is I don't know that any of those issues [climate change, peak oil, and economic instability] really have a lot of traction but what transition tries to do is it tries to build, the approach that it uses to these three issues are to promote community development and individual and community resiliency. And that is something that, let's just be total devil's advocates and let's say that climate change is a hoax, let's say that peak oil is wrong and they're gonna discover a new source of energy and um, the economy suddenly fixes itself, I also believe in the tooth fairy... but let's just assume for a second that we're totally wrong on our issues. If we really, really make a big difference – get people involved and we make our communities stronger, more localized, and make our individual citizens in our communities more resilient, to anything from earthquakes to tornadoes, to nuclear power generators melting down, um, our community will be able to react to all of those much more effectively. So even if we're totally wrong, we will have accomplished greater good and everybody will be better off because of us. So we kind of can't fail no matter what we do (Bill 2011).

Even if some of these crises even don't happen in our lifetime, uh, just the fact that we've learned some things and are doing things, irregardless of whether the catastrophe's gonna happen tomorrow, just good to know these things and do these things and uh, live lightly on the earth, as it were. It can only be positive, it can't hurt, you know, so why not? (David).

Several people related the idea of building a resilient lifestyle to concerns about future collapse. The quote below bring in several issues: the need to focus locally because of system blocks such as inactive local governments, climate change as an actor which will be discussed further in the next section, and the need to create other models or pilot projects so that when changes do occur, groups like TG can provide examples of how to deal with those changes in ways other than going to fear and hoarding. This shows how interrelated the concept of resilience is to many of the other findings.

Let's start, in permaculture you start in zone, in zone zero, you don't go out and try to get the city to do it at first, you do it yourself, and so, that is what you're talking about. We're visioning out there and then someone else is gonna make it happen. But when you vision, "how can I personally do it?" Then I'm either gonna do it or don't do it and I can't blame someone else for not doing it. Now that does beg the issue of huge systems that are gonna be dismantled but I don't think we're gonna dismantle them. I think they're gonna fall from the inside, just like the Berlin Wall. I think that some of those systems are gonna sort of crumble, start to cave, and it's, and one of the ideas is, so what small kind of pilots can we have in place that will give people hope that if the system does fall, we're okay? I mean, we've got lifeboats (Marie 2011a).

### *As an Actor*

Several people talked about climate change and other future changes as catalysts. Although they viewed those changes as frightening, they also expressed a belief that many people would not be motivated to change until the changes started to occur. Once the climate really begins to change or oil begins to become either unavailable or prohibitively expensive, people will begin to be drawn into alternative ways of life such as those TG is developing. In this way, the participants placed future changes as actors within their work.

If suddenly you fill, you go from filling your tank with \$20 and the next time you fill your tank it's \$40 for the same amount of gasoline, that gets everybody's attention... We think about it just as escalating cost... which definitely affects us, but we rarely think of it as simply not being available, which changes the entire playing field... You do not think, as you plan your trip back to the West, you don't think about it not being available, you're starting out with every confidence that it will be there, you'll just have to pay more for it, but that's really a false assumption and I think we all go on that... Last, what - two years ago when, um, the... when the oil rigs in the Gulf were burning, this part of North Carolina was one of the last to get gasoline flowing again, our gas stations were empty, there, there was no gasoline to be had. That was quite an eye-opener for a lot of people, I mean, all of us! We don't think about, I don't think about... whether it's there or not, I just grumble about the cost (Sue 2011).

I think there are a lot of people on the fence. There's a lot of people that don't know much, there's a fair number of people on the fence. And uh, who knows, uh, they get interested and go whole heartedly into it after, in a while. Maybe as things get tougher, uh, you might see more of people jumpin in. so it's good to have it out there (David 2011).

I agree with several people that the external environment is probably gonna be a big factor in when the conversation starts, shifting big scale (Marie 2011b).

Simultaneously, several people saw the lack of current change – slow or fairly invisible climate change and ever so gradually increasing gas prices – as impediments to current lifestyle changes for many people. People around them are not changing because the stakes are not high enough yet, the problems and challenges not great enough. They seemed to view this as one of the reasons for their difficulties with outreach and bridging: because people are not seeing climate change as impacting their lives currently, they have little motivation to change their habits.

I really think that when gas gets to be, you know, five or seven or ten dollars a gallon, that's really gonna motivate people to make some significant changes. I think as long as people tend to keep their lives the way they are, pretty much, um, we're not gonna get, uh, a significant amount of change from the majority of the population. I think we'll get some pockets of change going on either with individuals or within smaller groups (Ethan 2011).

I think there's always an initial burst of enthusiasm, um, which is wonderful... it... tells people... what's out there and what may be happening and that's fun to see, um... it's not an easy thing to alter your lifestyle, to change your way of thinking, um, particularly when there's no crisis right in front of you - if there's a crisis right in front of you, then you have no choice, um, that'll happen whether you want it to or not, but when it looks

like things are kinda ok, it's difficult to upset what's a pretty comfortable way of thinking (Sue 2011).

### *Difficulties with Scale*

While the participants felt strongly that the localized scale of their work was critical to their sense of efficacy, working at a small scale also created cognitive challenges. Several times, when people were talking about actions they had taken or things they had changed in their lives, they would begin to look unhappy or breathe a long sigh. They would talk about the changes they were making, but they would simultaneously belittle their actions as minor or inconsequential. This points to the difficulty of working on an issue that exists at a different scale than the scale at which one is working and the challenges to self- and collective-efficacy that presents: climate change is a global phenomenon affected by international actors far beyond the scale of the city of Gardiner; however, the scale at which participants felt the most effective was a very different, much smaller, local scale.

Trying to just do all the little things, you know, I've done all the, you know, um... I think the awareness of how much I use my car and my vehicle, um, I'm very fortunate living in this area in that I don't have to use air conditioning in the summer, and you know that's, those are all those individual changes, but I feel like I'm not doing nearly enough, I mean I have a garden, I co-garden with two neighbors across, in the back yard, the neighbor across the street that has sun, um... but it's a beginning, it's a beginning, and I, it's a beginning (Marie 2011a).

I don't for one minute think that we, we in our house are going to be so resilient that the economy can come crashing and we can have no water anymore ... I'm not on that wavelength, you know, it's not like I'm stacking canned goods in a bunker. I will never be there... It's not that my doing that is making one iota of difference in the big picture because for every one of me, there is a hundred and 99.9 who are just blissfully unaware and it doesn't, and if they are even vaguely aware, it doesn't matter to them, but we live in a country of choices and so, for me, I just do what my own conscience says is the right thing to do and if I can walk gently on the earth... it's just doing the right thing (Brenda 2011).

And it seems so overwhelming at times that nothing that we can do will really affect that, so, that's one reason why I'm, I'm really clear that for me, there has to be a, um, there has to be more than the activism part, there has to be some kind of grounding in some kind of

spiritual tradition for me, um, there has to be a sense that I don't know the answers know but if I can stay awake, maybe they will show themselves (Marie 2011a).

Some of the participants also spoke to other challenges that emerge due to the scale of action within a small community and some of the challenges that emerge from working in the local environment: sometimes the size of the group and the close proximity of its work impede opportunities to be outspoken.

When I join a group like [350.org] or something like that over there and that I show up in that group as a member of the group and that's all, and I'm there because we share a concern about something and we're activists and we're acting in a certain way because of our shared goal, that probably, well that's different than coming together with ones' neighbors... whom you see all the time and in lots of different contexts and so in this neighborhood group, I think there's a lower bar, a lower common denominator if you will, there's more of a sensitivity to, "well we don't want to offend that person because they said they don't want to do this activity and they're not interested," so, you know, we all have to get along... so you say, okay, fine, we'll do rain barrels, even though we could be out trying to reach the business community or the churches or whatever... if you take a stronger line (Noah 2011).

You get all that social dynamic in the mix, so I think what it, my, my sense is that it lowers the, um... ability to be outspoken or to take a stand (Noah 2011).

### *System Blocks*

Several interviewees mentioned things in the system that served as blocks to progress, including government officials and corporations that resist the kinds of changes that TG would like to see. These system blocks exist at the local, state, national, and international level and seemed to be highly disempowering to participants, at least when they considered any work beyond the individual and community scale.

I've had too much experience fighting city hall and you can expend a lot of energy picketing, getting letter-writing campaigns, getting people to put their name on a list, calling the county commissioners and telling them you'll vote them out which is the easiest way to do it if you want to do it anyway, so... that's pretty much the way it works. So I'm not much in favor of putting a lot of effort into the halls of government until the citizens, um, have kind of built up their position strong enough to where they can demand something and actually make their elected officials quiver and I've yet to see that (Bill 2011).

Elected officials do not lead. They follow. It took me a long time to figure that out... Occasionally you'll have a statesperson in a moment of crisis, be able to galvanize, but for the most part, elected officials follow what they consider is... the will of the people. And it's usually the path with least resistance (Marie 2011a).

I think one of our challenges is gonna be, um, convincing the local authorities um, the county commissioners and uh, city council of Gardiner, um, to buy into the Transition movement and I think that's gonna take a really long time, it's gonna be, it's not gonna happen, um, up front, it's gonna have to be a, a grassroots effort for a long time that gradually will gain more, um, support to the point where the county commissioners are not going to be able to ignore some things, or maybe our, maybe our societal conditions will change to the point where they are not going to be able to ignore, you know, they can't ignore \$10/gallon gas prices for example, they're going to have to do something to help people with transportation, you know, I think, it's not so much that it's backward, it's just that it's very, they like the way things are, they don't wanna, uh, uh, they don't wanna rattle things, they don't wanna get people upset, they don't wanna raise taxes to do things, uh, you know, it's all, everything's fine, you know, we don't have to do anything. I don't know (Ethan 2011).

However, knowledge of these system blocks also bolstered confidence in the critical nature of the localized scale of their work. Because they did not see top-down solutions as being promising, their bottom-up, collaborative, community-based work was considered to be all the more important.

The second component which I think makes it powerful is its desires to be grassroots, ground-up, totally community led instead of trying to, uh, either go to the Washington, DC or the state capitol or the mayor's office and say, you need to... fix this, and they ignore you, this is starting from the other end and getting individuals empowered and um, with a positive vision and that's powerful, it's a powerfully different way to do it (Bill 2011).

Communities - I think it's gonna be in community, if there's any hope. It's not gonna be government - I, that's where the Transition movement really resonates with me - I do not think we can work through government - we can do the policy fights all we want to - government is gonna follow, not lead... and an individual doesn't stand a chance (Marie 2011b).

All of the various elements of this finding illustrate the challenge participants face in dealing with climate change. While they recognize that it is a huge, overwhelming issue occurring at an international scale, to gain a sense of efficacy, they need to find ways to address it at a local

level, within their own lives and within their communities. This choice of scale is one that most feel strongly about, but is still a choice with its own obstacles and cognitive barriers.

### ***Empowerment***

There were many comments related to the interviewees' levels of empowerment. Many of the interviewees referenced feelings of hope, "not a Polyanna kind of hope," but a hope based in the knowledge that other people are working on this and that a better future might be possible. Most of the interviewees appeared to have an emerging sense of their own potential and ability to address future challenges. Many noted the hands-on work of building resilience as being empowering. Several also noted the importance of "meeting with other people" and building community as being empowering.

I have um, when I looked at these issues and the inability of people to properly react to them in any type of coherent way, uh, that was pretty depressing and I didn't know what I could do but I started doing things like learning permaculture and um, gardening, and trying to build community and um, other personal resiliency things and um, meeting with other people, and because of that I've become, uh, I'm not sure optimistic would be a good word, but I'm open to the possibility of optimism, and uh, much more content and happier with where I am because of it (Marie 2011a).

Some participants spoke about the positive vision that the group has developed as empowering, giving them faith that a better future was possible and giving them good reason to continue their work.

Annie: What helps [when you are feeling disempowered]? Marie: Coming back to the present moment. Um... Knowing that even in the face of all the scientific evidence, and I don't really believe that there's gonna be some kind of technology salvation, but that people are resourceful, and that there will be pockets of communities that will come up with ways to survive and perhaps even thrive on the earth that they will be able to inhabit, um, and that... that somehow the capacity of the human spirit will triumph the meltdown to the base of our animal instincts. That somehow, some of the spiritual teachers in all the traditions have shown us there's a different way. And this may be the time in our history, I mean this is the time in our history, um... to see how much we have the capacity to (.) to know that anything... we do to another person, we do to ourselves, and

if we ever grasp that... I have hope for the world, if, even if some people grasp it... I hope that... in some small way maybe that work will be of some help (Marie 2011b).

I don't know what the future's gonna be but I know that I'm much more at peace and much more, um... satisfied, well satisfied's not the word, um... the words that come to mind are satisfied and hopeful but it's not, it's not a uh Pollyanna kind of hope, it's, it's the kind of hope that's grounded in the fact that there are some really wonderful human beings on the face of the planet, some who are awake and some who we're gonna wake up, but there, there, there is this part of human nature, I mean there is the dark side too that when there's scarcity and all this kind of stuff, yes we're gonna see it all, we're gonna see it all, but to have found some people who are trying to operate from out of that other place, uh, has been just one of the greatest gifts the whole transition movement has given to me. And I wanna stay connected with that group and be a part of giving to others too... It is huge. It is huge for me (Marie 2011b).

Several participants stated that they feel as though they have changed or that they feel differently now that they have spent some time with the group. This included feeling differently about themselves, differently about future changes like climate change, and differently about the actions required by those changes.

Tony: I feel quite a bit differently. Um, I used to be the rabble-rouser, the protester, the one that's out there on the picket line, um... but now I feel it's more of a, a personal kind of thing. I don't, I don't need to be out there. I need to be with, one on one with people, and um, just fostering it internally rather than screaming and shouting and having tear gas thrown at me and stuff like that. Donna: Occupy yourself. Tony: Yeah. I had a big, I still am wrestling with the occupy movement. I was there for a while, I was on picket lines for a while and now, I'm thinking it's not such a good idea. It's better to work within, within yourself, so that's changed... that reinforced the fact that we really need to just, uh, take care of ourselves. See what's going on within us rather than uh, standing at the street corner (Donna 2011; Tony 2011).

Ultimately I'm excited to evolve and I'm aware of the places I smack up against my own walls and they hurt, you know... I'll wait enough time and, you know, just sort of try... to just be honest and in my heart, and in the highest integrity I can be, because I, honestly, that's the only way I know how to proceed really, you know? ... I'm excited to be as good a being, not really good, as conscious a being as I can be. And um, the older I get the more important that comes, becomes. You know, and it's definitely changing me, yeah (Linda 2011).

Some spoke to the importance of remaining patient and perhaps maintaining lower expectations as important to their empowerment.

I think we've gotta be patient, I think that when you look at how much we've accomplished over the last year and a half, it's pretty um, it's pretty impressive and so I think we want everything to happen quicker because we're worried that, you know, there are gonna be some changes in the world that are gonna significantly impact us and, and we're not gonna be ready for them, um, so there's that urgency there, um, but I think we just have to realize that this is gonna take a while, um, that, you know, we just gotta accept what, um, what's happening and, you know, if we only have five book studies this year then that's what it is, and you know, we can only do so much to convince people to become involved and to read about some of these, uh, problems, and so on, so... patience (Ethan 2011).

I had one person say in a small group I was in said "I don't know if we're gonna be able to do anything or not but I know that I'm more at peace now than I've ever been because I'm with people who are not asleep and who are trying to create a community of people to live differently" and if that's all we do, then at least I will have been doing my work, so, um, but without those people saying that, when I get discouraged, I, I would retreat back into denial. So you know, how do you pace yourself, sustain yourself, know that what you can do is sufficient, even if we may not make huge headway?... It's huge (Marie 2011a).

### *Disempowerment*

Interviewees also spoke, though, of moments of disempowerment and feelings of "doom and gloom." As one interviewee explained, "it comes in waves." The comments below illustrate those feelings, some of the factors that cause those feelings, and some of the ways in which people emerge from feelings of disempowerment.

Sometimes I really go down in the pit and think... I can't handle this and when you get there, I, I know that... in any pit of depression you just wait it out and you'll crawl back up, um, sometimes I call up somebody and say, "okay, talk me out of this, show me that, that sunshine again," uh, mostly - not always, but mostly I know that um... I can't go there, I can't think about that because it is overwhelming and you get to a point - why should I do anything? I can't do anything to change it, so it brings the focus back to a very small... uh, area that I can do something about. I can only really change myself, so... that's where - that's where we all have to start anyway (Sue 2011).

For me, it is a sense, when I'm honest about it, that I feel like... the developments in the world, the way the planet is responding, acting, and the situation we're in is out of control... My biggest concern is that we will have a tipping point as a civilization where it doesn't matter how many light bulbs we change, doesn't matter how many Priuses we own... for me, it starts to take, to add up, and my, again, my intuition is, there's so many things that just five years ago were possibilities and now they're real and I sit back and say, you know, what if we have passed the point of no return? (.) So that, that doesn't inspire anyone... It's like, okay, I'll do what I can do as long as I'm here (Noah 2011).

How we no longer have the earth that we were gifted. And whatever creation story you want to choose. How we have fundamentally altered ... that's when I get very... that's when the uh, the grief and the depression and the sense of loss sweeps over (Marie 2011a).

These comments about empowerment and disempowerment illustrate the process that these individuals have gone through in order to find ways to manage the psychological barriers to engagement with climate change. Empowerment is not something that is stable and enduring once achieved. These quotes show the ongoing cyclical challenges that participants face and demonstrate the importance of a continuing group process.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate the complexity of the empowerment process in this context. The quotes included illustrate the individual process of empowerment as well as many of the challenges faced during that process. They illustrate the power of the organization in facilitating and encouraging that process as well as the obstacles faced by organizers in doing this work. It is a complex, multi-scalar, and multi-faceted process and those involved clearly understand that.

In conducting the analysis, some of the themes, such as Safe Space, came up more regularly than others, such as Awareness-Raising and Capacity-Building. All of those themes though, are analyzed here, related to the larger theoretical perspectives and questioned and probed for greater understanding and interpretation.

### *Safe Space*

The empowerment literature has noted the importance of providing this relational environment, providing support systems, caring relationships, and a strong sense of community (Maton 2008).

In the short term, the grassroots organization generates a sense of strength in numbers and provides an arena in which equally unknowing companions can collaborate in mutually supportive problem solving. Over the long haul, it nurtures the maturation of incipient skills by providing an environment in which risks can be taken, frustrations can be shared, fears can be allayed, and support can be reinforced (Kieffer 1984, 21).

This space emerged in several different ways for Transition Gardiner. First, the creation of a space for participants to be emotional is noteworthy in large part due to its contrast from the typical psychological barrier someone might encounter. As was pointed out in the literature review, people facing climate change often choose to deny or ignore it due to the challenge it represents to their emotional norms. We do not enjoy being angry, depressed, and anxious.

When confronted with issues like climate change, for which there is no easy action to take and no straightforward way of avoiding negative emotions, we often resort to denial or feigned ignorance to avoid being overwrought by those negative emotions. However, the quotes within this finding point to the development of a space where people could experience healthy amounts of negative emotions while learning new behavioral responses that help them to cope better. People could “scream and shout and you know, do all that response that’s very necessary” (Sue 2011), but were then supported, offered ideas and stories of success, and encouraged not to ignore and extinguish those feelings, but to accept them and, in community, find positive emotions as well. Little has been written about this phenomenon in the empowerment theory, but its importance to the participants is undeniable.

Second, the creation of a space for building relationships and finding community is noteworthy because of the ongoing support and encouragement those offer over time. Bandura (1977) noted that being in close proximity to others can increase our perception of efficacy, when we live vicariously through others’ experiences of overcoming challenges or are persuaded into action by others. Several of the interviewees spoke to this process. Many though, also spoke to the strength of the relationships and their personal utility. Our cultural norms encourage us to avoid dealing with issues like climate change. Some interviewees mentioned the experience of bringing their Transition work back to their families or other circles of friends and being rebuffed and asked not to talk about it because ‘it’s depressing.’ As one interviewee stated, “There is a comfort that comes in just knowing that there’s all these people who see this as a problem” (Noah 2011). Transition Gardiner offers people a new community of like-minded people who can help each other by developing their own community. The focus on emotional and social support creates an empowering, inviting, and encouraging environment for those

involved. This has kept many of them involved, even through times of frustration, and it is an important piece to consider, particularly as it is a piece that is very difficult to replicate or create in the more top-down, environmental advocacy type environment which many organizations seek to create.

Third, some used this space to develop more functional, strategic networks. These are highly relevant in the context of resilience building and are common in some of the literature on disaster planning. As Swim and Reser (2011) note,

Community responses to stressors include volunteerism and helping neighbors cope with lack of water, lack of basic amenities, or destruction of their homes. It is not uncommon for groups to emerge after disasters that help communities cope with crises, reflecting the interactive dynamics of collective coping, community resilience, and a crisis-initiated and renewed group identity and sense of community (284).

This is an area where climate change and disaster planning have much in common. Whether proactive or reactive in nature, disaster response requires strategic partnerships across the community, a sense of all coming together to assist for the common good. Particularly because many of the interviewees believe that climate change, peak oil, and economic instability may cause shocks to the system, this similarity to disaster preparedness is understandable. It is possible that this focus on network development for disaster preparedness also assists with issues of ontological security. As Tony (2011) said in his interview, “Gathering community together is, is big for me because what I’m doing is, is um, piling up an infrastructure that we can count on each other.” Although those who seek to develop networks envision the future as being potentially turbulent and chaotic, they are actively creating mechanisms that allow them to simultaneously envision ways to stabilize that chaos. Perhaps by planning ahead, they are reducing their anxiety about those future challenges and making it easier for themselves to accept what the future may hold.

Fourth, TG offers a space for participants to be creative and positive, which also relates back to the challenges of addressing ontological security. Across environmental fields, many people have long desired to find ways to incorporate creativity and the arts but have often struggled to understand how to do so. It is a necessary question to answer though, as opportunities for creativity can help us to envision better futures and new paths forward. As Fritze et al (2008) state, “the challenges of climate change adaptation may galvanize creative ideas and actions in ways that transform and strengthen the resilience and creativity of individuals and communities... As a common threat, climate change may provide an impetus for collaborative action within communities” (12). Richard Eckersley (2008) notes that this opportunity lies in the “creative energy of activism” (39). In addition, many authors have written about the importance of including positivity in work that is psychologically taxing (Doherty and Clayton 2011; Gifford, Kormos, and McIntyre 2011; Kieffer 1984; Reser and Swim 2011). Gifford et al (2011) explain the “positive psychology approach to explaining human coping and adaptation to climate change, which focuses on factors that influence individual wellbeing, happiness, and life satisfaction, rather than on distress” (811). Yusoff and Gabrys (2011) bring these two concepts of creativity and positivity together in describing the benefits of imagination in the context of climate change:

The work of the imagination is a will to become; in many different ways the imagination extends, pushes, challenges, and confides to us what the human is. But, perhaps the greatest work of the imagination is its counterweight to the actuality of the world, to imagine how we might be otherwise... Given the challenges that climate change presents to us, which are political, social, cultural, moral, ethical, spiritual, physical, and emotional, our ability to imagine other possibilities, to embrace decidedly different futures with creativity and resolve, to learn to let go of the sense of permanence we may have felt about certain landscapes that have seemed to be always so, and to embrace change, is paramount to building resilience and adaptive capacity (529).

This section eloquently states the sense that many of my interviewees so strongly felt about the importance of including opportunities for creativity in their work. One interviewee stated “I

think, there's several things that came out of that first book group, um, one was that we all started sharing stories and started sharing ideas about how we could, uh, grow more of our own food, uh, power down, uh, our electrical use, um, you know, drive less, uh, really started doing some dreaming about what could be" (Ethan 2011). It allowed them the space to imagine.

Altogether, this theme speaks to the power of social capital. Some of the main elements of social capital include the development of trust, cooperation, confidence in self and others, and the maintenance or continuation of action; many of these elements are visible throughout this theme. The work of building relationships and networks and creating communities that support people emotionally and encourage creativity and positivity is the work of building social capital. Particularly, this work relates to bonding social capital. In some ways, it makes the group resemble group therapy, like Alcoholics Anonymous, in that it is a non-judgmental, supportive space for the exploration of a shared problem. As defined by Hoppe and Reinelt (2010), "bonding indicates a sense of trusted community where interactions are familiar and efficient" (601). While some have written about the economic benefits of social capital in terms of leverage, such as using social capital to 'get ahead', or as "investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace" (Lin 2002, 19), this example of social capital goes beyond the economy of social relationships to the personal and emotional benefits of those relationships.

### ***Structure***

The quotes within this theme demonstrate Transition Gardiner's lack of structure and the challenges associated with it, but also the strength that participants saw emerging from it. The importance of having a collaborative space, altruism, and other elements of this finding strongly relate to the empowerment literature. In his article on key organizational characteristics for empowerment, Maton (2008) points out the importance of having an open opportunity role

structure, meaning an environment in which there are many different, highly accessible roles available to participants at various levels of the organization. Maton (2008) also speaks to the importance of being ‘strengths-based,’ believing that all members have different and useful capabilities and seeing all members as potential resources for the group’s growth. These elements of the theory emerge both in the ways interviewees speak about the knowledge and skills they have gained and in the way they talk about the asset-focused nature of the group. It is clear that they have a focus on shared leadership and on engaging members in diverse ways. As is stated in a document from the group explaining their rules for self-governance, “We hold a shared expectation that each of us is a leader of this effort in her or his unique way and that we carry the responsibility to lead from wherever we sit and in whatever way we can” (2011a, 1).

This emphasis on assets and low-egotism assists Transition Gardiner in facilitating empowerment because it is this type of setting that most effectively encourages not only participation alone, but the participant’s ability to view themselves as an actor in the work and not simply a bystander. The participant becomes engaged and sees their work as having an impact because their skills are utilized and appreciated by the group. They also become, through this process, more committed to the organization which increases the group’s viability. These attributes make the group very different from a typical, top-down, advocacy type campaign. As one interviewee noted, “You know, something like this, the greatest success would be that it becomes mainstream... And that people don’t even have to know where it came from. That’s the difference between an organization and something that’s grassroots, is that at some point you don’t even want to have to claim the credit for it as long as you see it happening” (Sue 2011).

In an attempt to gain input from everyone and to truly share leadership among all participants, the group’s structure remained loose. This was an asset to the group in that it

offered them flexibility and allowed them to focus on creative brainstorming and consensus; however, it also created several challenges as it became difficult to make decisions and make clear progress. The group's culture also offered obstacles in that as a volunteer-based organization, ongoing viability was challenging as volunteers became overworked or pressed for time. Nonetheless, the group has weathered these challenges well, finding validation in participants' ongoing commitment to the culture of the organization and continued attempts at finding the balance between too much structure and a lack thereof. As Transition Gardiner members describes themselves in their *Guidelines for Self-Governance*, they "are a group of volunteers who come together willingly to establish a viable movement toward a more resilient community" (Transition Gardiner 2011a, 1).

Several researchers have noted the difficulty of developing an empowering organization given these challenges. As Peterson and Zimmerman (2004) note,

Organizational empowerment may not be assessed by a single operational definition because it takes on different forms for different types of organizations, environments in which organizations operate, and times. It is also vital to recognize that organizational empowerment, or empowerment at any level, is dynamic and changes over time (139).

It is interesting to note that even within the three TG groups (the Initiating Group, Maple Ridge group, and Work and Play group) each has taken on a different culture and structure. The Maple Ridge group appears to be the most directed and structured, having gone through a strategic planning process and being fairly well-focused on their goals. The Initiating Group is likely the next most structured and is becoming more structured as they begin to develop more specific goals. The Work and Play group is by far the most unstructured, choosing to work on whatever emerges from the group's desires from week to week. As one of the members of the Work and Play group explained the differences between her group and the Maple Ridge group,

I had the opportunity to sit next to, um, the man who has kind of created that community in transition, and if you looked at us together, we're very different and I remember him

saying to me, and you know, I know him a little bit, and he said, “I couldn’t function in your group. There’s no structure.” And um, I think that’s the magic is that there is structure but the structure is created by itself, so there’s really no leaders... we do plan things so that is structure, and, um, we accomplish things... he was saying that it was too loose. He was saying it just didn’t seem like he could be comfortable with the, um, the movement that’s here. So it was, it was really interesting to sit side by side and um, and share... as I would not be happy, you know, in the structure (Donna 2011).

This illustrates the relevance of Peterson and Zimmerman’s quote about the dynamic and divergent ways in which empowering organizations operate.

It also illustrates the challenges that an organizer faces in developing an organization that will be welcoming and provide a cultural fit for a wide diversity of people. Perhaps if group leaders were trained in organizational development with a focus on this particular type of organization, it would not be so difficult. However, Transition Towns and grassroots networks in general, are typically volunteer-run and –managed. This makes it unlikely that participants will have had significant experience managing any kind of organization, let alone one that requires this flexible, dynamic, and ever-changing type of environment. Unfortunately, there is little in the empowerment literature that offers insight as to how to address these challenges on the ground. And although the Transition Handbook does an effective job of illustrating the types of outreach events a group might have and how to market or communicate the group’s vision and mission, it offers little insight into organizational development.

This is a challenge that will likely present itself to most Transition Initiatives, particularly those that try to create a grassroots, bottom-up, empowerment-focused environment.

Nonetheless, participants with Transition Gardiner have found that the members’ ongoing commitment to the cause and to the group has been a source of encouragement for continuing to work on these challenges, brainstorming new ideas and trying new things even as members become fatigued. It is likely that this commitment has been assisted by the strong relationships

that have been developed as well as the combination of increased knowledge of future challenges with the group's invigorating focus on positivity.

### ***Awareness-Raising and Capacity-Building***

Empowerment theory places significant emphasis on the importance of increasing the individual's awareness and capacity. Zimmerman has written about the necessity of a 'critical awareness' several times (1990b; 1990a; 1992; 1995). He has defined the awareness piece as "an understanding of causal agents in order to effectively interact in the settings that are important... Critical awareness refers to one's understanding of the resources needed to achieve a desired goal, knowledge of how to acquire those resources, and skills for managing resources once they are obtained" (1995; citing: Kieffer 1984; Freire 1973). Zimmerman argues that this development of knowledge and skills is necessary because it allows individuals to access, and begin to master, their environments. Others have opened up the purpose further and spoken about the broader benefit to the individual of having this awareness, as it allows them to more clearly understand the blocks in the system, the level of their own disempowerment, and hopefully, simultaneously arm them for future battle with their environment (Rubin and Rubin 2001). Riger (1993) has taken issue with this combative tone of much of the empowerment literature, arguing that the goals of 'mastery' and 'preparing for battle' simply reinforce the cyclical pattern of winners and losers as opposed to reimagining a culture in which one group's gain does not have to mean another group's decline.

Elements of these various perspectives are visible in the finding on awareness and capacity. The quotes in this finding point to the importance of the new knowledge and skills the participants gained and the benefits they have offered them. For example, Marie (2011a) stated, "the Transition movement put it in the perspective I needed... the garden had been started a

couple of years ago because I love to weed and then all of a sudden, it was like, what if we really had to produce our food off it? If it wasn't a hobby? So we tried to be much more intentional." Throughout some of the other findings, quotes emerge as well that point to the way in which this new knowledge had deepened their critical awareness of the systemic problems we face and the complexity of the issues. Other quotes, particularly in the findings related to collaboration and structure, point to the group's anti-combative stance, their focus on inclusiveness. It is possible that these elements together reflect a matured type of empowerment that has managed to address all three of the goals and issues raised by the theory. These elements are also important in terms of evaluating their levels of empowerment.

Kieffer (1984) broke the process of empowerment into four consecutive parts: the era of entry; the era of advancement; the era of incorporation; and the era of commitment. The focus on development of awareness and capacity first becomes important in his 'era of advancement,' as participants

...become aware of the interconnections of social, political, and economic relations. Cultivation of more critical analysis, in turn, provokes continuing political action. The unfolding illumination of political process and deepening clarification of the relations through which exploitation and alienation are maintained lead eventually to a maturation of empowerment (1984, 21).

This continues into the 'era of incorporation,' wherein "participants confront and learn to contend with the permanence and painfulness of structural barriers to self-determination" (1984, 22). Kieffer also references the development of "the increasingly self-conscious awareness of self as a visible and effective actor in the community, and continuous reflection on one's role and identity" (1984, 23).

In evaluating levels of empowerment from this perspective, it appears that, unsurprisingly, participants are progressing at different rates. For some, an understanding of the world and their self-perception of their efficacy within it was limited or emergent. Others clearly

and critically saw power imbalances and challenges to progress and could see their role in addressing them. In this section, we can begin to note the challenges between the awareness of the global-scale issues and the decision to take action at a much smaller scale. This conflict becomes more prevalent in later findings but it begins to emerge here. Nonetheless, many interviewees spoke to the skills and knowledge they had gained and the awareness and confidence it had offered them.

The role of the stories of success are particularly interesting here, in contrast to the critical, and oftentimes negative, focus of gaining awareness. The stories of success seem to offer the beginnings of hope and the beginnings of a sense of a broader community at work on the issues, within the community, within the region, and around the world. “You can see people and be involved with people... that have become more resilient and you see... if you get people to take a few small actions and see the results from it, whatever it may be, then they can start taking more actions” (Marie 2011a). This knowledge serves to counteract some of the disempowering understanding of the ‘way of the world’ by offering hints of opportunity and positivity.

### ***Outreach and Bridging***

As is illustrated by the quotes within this theme, TG participants hold the group’s work of conducting outreach and bridging to be very important. This makes sense. It is arguable that the success of their work of developing a resilient community depends on the success of their efforts to engage a larger proportion of the community. Much of the literature on social capital argues that focusing on bonding alone can create highly separated, individualistic groups within a community that are ineffective at crossing boundaries and finding ways to achieve mutual goals. In addition, a failure to build bridges with other groups means a failure to include the positions

and opinions of others within the community which creates a final product that is not likely to do as well as a final product that includes a broader collection of opinions and understandings of the problem (Hoppe and Reinelt 2010; Gittel and Vidal 1998; Flora and Flora 2007). If we assume then that outreach and bridging is a critical piece of the work of TG, the question remains how best to conduct that work. As identified by many of the participants, the answer is still undetermined.

The challenge of conducting outreach is heightened by the issue of climate change itself. All organizations face the challenge of how to market their product more effectively or how to better engage members in their issue of choice; however, climate change offers additional challenges. The “barriers to engagement” faced by all and the disempowering nature of climate change means that the task of outreach and bridging is made more difficult for groups like TG. Still, insight into how TG could improve its outreach can be derived from a variety of theoretical backgrounds. First, some of the quotes in this theme show the focus that some interviewees have on education as a primary outreach tool. As one interviewee stated, “I think the philosophy behind this group anyway, is that... people will be converted by just seeing what some of us are doing, and say, ‘Geez, hey, not a bad idea’” (David 2011). It appears that they believe that effective education and communication will show people the pressing and urgent nature of climate change, which will cause them to begin to take action. However, the climate change literature has shown that communication alone is not an adequate engagement tool (Norgaard 2009). Additionally, Kieffer’s (1984) research on empowerment also found that communication was not an adequate motivator. He states, “Initial reactions are never fostered by ‘consciousness-raising,’ intellectual analysis, or other merely educative intervention... In each case, the mobilizing episode has some particular symbolic or emotional significance for the

person involved” (19). Although awareness-raising is an important element of the empowerment process, it will not function alone to engage people.

How then, can groups tap into that ‘symbolic or emotional’ episode? The work of creating a safe space may be an important concept here, offering individuals the space to explore experiences they may have had in the past and encouraging them to give those experiences the weight they deserve. In fact, all of the elements of empowerment covered by these themes are important to share with potential new members. Just as those I interviewed found these things to be highly important to their participation, so might these elements prove to be important to future participants. The Transition Handbook encourages these types of opportunities and interactions through the creation of ‘working groups,’ smaller groups focused on specific topics or aspects of the process (Hopkins 2008). For example, some Transition Towns have working groups organized into food and agriculture, health and wellness, transportation, economy, energy efficiency, and other areas of resilience-building. These offer more people the opportunity to get involved in a meaningful way because there are more groups, but also because people can be involved in the issue that most interests them, increasing the likelihood that at least one of the topics will resonate with each person.

In an article on social network analysis and leadership networks, Hoppe and Reinelt (2010) outline four types of leadership networks: peer leadership networks, consisting of leaders who are linked by shared interests and commitments for sharing advice and support; organization leadership networks, consisting of ties designed to increase performance across teams or organizations; field-policy leadership networks, similar to peer leadership networks in organization but with the goal of shaping and influencing a field or policy; and collective leadership networks, loose networks among people with a common cause or goal. These

networks typically rely on a core cluster of people with links between many different participants, placing particular importance on bridgers, those who can connect to other clusters of people. Some individuals may have more or less influence depending on how many people they know or how many people see them as a resource; however, all individuals in the network have the potential to offer important social capital resources.

Within the concept of ‘working groups,’ the idea of a collective leadership network provides the closest comparison.

At the heart of collective leadership are groups of diverse people who are connected and taking actions that positively affect themselves and their communities. Collective leadership networks rely on self-organizing of members who share a common goal. The value of collective leadership networks is in their capacity to solve problems quickly in an environment of uncertainty and complexity. Collective leadership networks also provide each member with a sense of purpose that comes from the feeling of belonging to something bigger than oneself. (Hoppe and Reinelt 2010, 612).

This description provides insight into the type of structure that groups like TG might utilize in engaging more people without overextending the volunteers that organize the group. Hoppe and Reinelt describe an example of a network that mapped their assets by asking all participants what problems they were willing to work on and the time they had available to share. This allowed members to self-aggregate to form working clusters that could operate somewhat independently of the overarching network, while still being accessible to and associated with the network. With a mailing list of over 330 people, but an initiating group of only about 10, this type of network could provide an opportunity for the group to address the challenges of meaningfully engaging more people while operating with a minimal volunteer base. As one interviewee stated, “I’m assuming that some of these people, maybe even many of them, are active in their church. There’s a community of people... Are there other groups that you belong to that are established that we could go and talk to?” (Noah 2011). If so, those TG members could act as important bridgers, using their ties to extend the work of the group. Regardless of the path the group

chooses to take with further organizing, it is critical to note the challenges that groups working in this arena face in engaging additional participants.

### *Perception of Climate Change*

This theme presents several of the challenges participants face in constructing their perceptions of climate change. Some comments focused on the need for mitigation, while others focused on the need for resilience. Some comments noted the benefits of the localized scale of resilience, while others noted a sense of disappointment associated with the small scale of action. Some comments displayed a sense of efficacy while others banked on the assistance of climate change and peak oil in activating the populace towards change. Several noted the difficulty presented by the actions of those in power, in business or in government, that represented blocks to potential progress. What is perhaps most interesting about these sentiments is that most people spoke to most of these ideas. This shows a certain amount of remaining internal conflict about climate change and about the individual and collective sense of efficacy in addressing it. The fact that these individuals had joined an organization and had begun to take action on climate change, peak oil, and other coming challenges, did not mean that these issues had become clear and concrete issues in their heads. They continue to be issues that challenge the participants, conceptually, emotionally, and physically.

I was particularly intrigued by the acceptance that many participants noted of system blocks and of the idea of climate change as an actor. As Marie (2011b) stated, "I agree with several people that the external environment is probably gonna be a big factor in when the conversation starts shifting big scale." I wondered whether this acknowledgment of 'the way the world works,' that government, business, and citizens would not take action until they absolutely had to, meant that to a certain extent the participants had given up. It portrays a certain lack of

self-efficacy as they assume that they are unable to create change in those arenas. These feelings also might relate to a sense of learned inefficacy, “when people falsely accept the belief that they are not competent to fix a problem and as such become apathetic” (Rubin and Rubin 2001, 67). Participants clearly displayed a critical awareness of the disempowering nature of climate change and an understanding of their position in the greater global system.

However, this assessment gives the participants short shrift. Indeed, several pointed out that their focus on resilience was critical to their sense of efficacy. Ethan (2012) stated “If you are going to have a grassroots effort, that is where your energy needs to go. Awareness and advocacy for global changes is still there, but the emphasis on local changes is viewed as just as important and more feasible.” As Krosnick et al (2006) note, “people stop paying attention to a problem when they realize that there are no easy solutions for it and... judge as nationally serious only those problems about which they think action should and can be taken” (34). In this context, it is possible that the participants have, to a certain extent, stopped paying attention to global mitigation of climate change because they recognize the lack of easy solutions and presence of system blocks. However, they have maintained their focus on that element of climate change which they see as actionable: local resilience. In this sense, the participants have created a scale of action and a goal at which they can have a sense of self- and collective-efficacy. From an empowerment viewpoint, this choice is likely a good one. It will allow them to take action in the short term and hopefully, their scale of choice will allow them to see the results of their action fairly quickly. This should encourage them to partake in further action in the future and engender a sense of empowerment over time (Kieffer 1984; Rich 1995; Zimmerman 1995; Zimmerman 1990b).

## ***Empowerment***

The quotes included in this theme relate primarily to the intrapersonal component of individual empowerment, which refers to “‘how people think about themselves’ with respect to their ability to achieve a particular outcome in a particular domain” (Cattaneo and Chapman 2010, 649; citing Zimmerman 1995, 588). Kieffer’s (1984) definition of the process of empowerment is useful here for evaluative purposes. Although his framework has been described briefly in other areas of this thesis, further depth will be offered here on the four stages he describes. During the era of entry, individuals experience a ‘mobilizing episode,’ and although they continue to feel powerless, they begin to develop a sense of community among their peers. In the era of advancement, these relationships are mature and expand. They may find mentors or build more supportive peer relationships and they develop a critical understanding of the system in which they exist. Participants begin to engage in political activity and this adds to their critical understanding. Kieffer describes the next phase, the era of incorporation as follows:

In this period, self-concept, strategic ability, and critical comprehension substantially mature. Through continuing struggle, participants confront and learn to contend with the permanence and painfulness of structural or institutional barriers to self-determination... Incorporating self-acceptance of new levels of political competence and alteration of one's fundamental sense of relation to the socio-political world are this period's focal developmental concerns... the elaboration of technical skill, the awakening of more abstract capacities, the increasingly self-conscious awareness of self as a visible and effective actor in the community, and continuous reflection on one's role and identity which characterize this phase of involvement directly parallel the central concerns of adolescence (Kieffer 1984, 22-23).

This is a key period of capacity-building as participants develop leadership and organizing skills and Kieffer describes that during this period, many participants recognize that they are beginning to change or ‘grow up.’ This may be a time of ongoing personal conflict and self-reconstruction. Finally, participants reach the era of commitment, where they find that they have changed. As

one of Kieffer's interviewees states, "It's changed my whole life... My values have changed. My priorities have changed. Everything has changed" (1984, 24). While they continue to struggle with integrating their new reality with the old, they search for meaningful ways to apply their new abilities, becoming more involved and engaged with their community and/or issue. They may take on new leadership roles or find other ways to become more active as their internal process of empowerment continues to evolve.

In utilizing this framework to evaluate the interviewees involved in this research, it becomes apparent that the interviewees are all at different positions within this process. None though, appear to be in the era of entry, all having progressed beyond the overwhelming sense of disempowerment to a place that allows them to experience some sense of efficacy and hope. Most interviewees seem to be in the era of incorporation. They have begun to integrate this new, critical understanding into their worldview and into their lives. They have begun to take action in their lives and have begun to see the impact on their individual and community resilience. They have developed a greater awareness and capacity for action and have continued to reflect both on their position within the system and the impact of their actions. Perhaps most tellingly, many note that they have changed, becoming more optimistic or positive, although they hesitate to be fully open to hope. For example, Linda notes "it's definitely changing me," Marie says "I've become... open to the possibility of optimism, and... much more content and happier," and Tony says, "I feel quite a bit differently." These quotes, among others, illustrate that these interviewees have advanced in their process of empowerment to a point where they recognize changes within themselves that increase their sense of self-efficacy and their potential to affect change. Additionally, many of these people have taken on leadership roles and have adjusted

their lives to make Transition Gardiner a priority, which points to their entry into the era of commitment.

This analysis points to a high level of empowerment among participants of Transition Gardiner. In addition to the positive statements that can be seen in the interviews, it is also important to recognize what we do not see. There are few signs of reactions to cognitive dissonance, with people blocking out or denying information that clashes with their worldview<sup>5</sup>. Although some individuals referenced their ontological security, most noted it in a way that gives the impression that they are finding ways to deal with the uncertainty the future provides. None stated that they were avoiding dealing with climate change because of emotional or cultural norms or to protect themselves from an affront to their identity; to the contrary, many noted the development of new emotional and cultural norms within the group and the sense that they were 'doing the right thing.' The participants are confronting emotional challenges and finding new ways to manage them and developing new cultural norms where action is the accepted norm as opposed to inaction. These findings point to a higher overall level of empowerment among the group's participants, meaning that at least in terms of the goal of empowering members, the group's efforts are beginning to succeed.

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<sup>5</sup> There was one individual who did display some cognitive dissonance, with statements such as, "It's not like I'm stacking canned goods in a bunker," and "we're... not trying to, um, uh, put ourselves up as, um, you know, firm believers, uh, granola, uh, tie-dye shirts, sandals, Birkenstocks, and, you know, candles in your home, you know." In the context of empowerment, this individual may be on the earlier end of the process and still experiencing a stronger sense of cognitive dissonance and disempowerment.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

For me, it is a sense, when I'm honest about it, that I feel like... the situation we're in is out of control... My biggest concern is that we will have a tipping point as a civilization where it doesn't matter how many light bulbs we change, doesn't matter how many Priuses we own... what if we have passed the point of no return? (Noah 2011)

Communities - I think it's gonna be in community, if there's any hope (Marie 2011b).

These quotes from interviewees synthesize both the problem and the purpose of this research. I personally have a great amount of concern about what our future holds, particularly in regards to the changes that climate change will bring. Although scientists are actively building and updating models to identify what may happen, the future always carries an element of the unknown and the unknown can be frightening. However, there is always the possibility that the future will also offer unforeseen opportunities. From my own experience, I believe that some of these opportunities will be found in community. That worldview drove me to explore the work currently being conducted by one community-based organization to empower individuals to take action on climate change. This research has utilized interviews with participants to understand both the process of empowerment they have experienced and the role that the organization played in that process. My hope is that this research will be able to offer insight to organizations currently conducting work in this arena and to those who may be looking to start something new.

### *Review of Findings*

Several important themes emerged from this research. First, the group has created a very safe and welcoming space; as one interviewee noted, "there's something important about how we come together" (Marie 2011a). The participants have created an environment in which people

can get angry and upset as they learn about the reality of climate change and be supported by the other participants in moving beyond anger and grief to more functional places of action. Many of the members have developed strong bonds within the group and have built relationships that have kept them from leaving the group when work and other personal issues began to draw on their time. Together they developed a community, oftentimes outside of their traditional family and friend groups, which provides them with a sense of being part of something greater. Beyond that, the community provides them with a sense of security that as climate change, peak oil, and economic instability continue to create changes in their region, they will have a network to depend upon for assistance as needed. Finally, the space created by the group is a space for positivity and creativity that serves to combat the depressing and disempowering nature of climate change. Instead of focusing on potential flooding or drought, participants can proactively plan for better future situations that are more resilient and adaptive to those natural tests that the future may bring. These elements define a space for developing new coping mechanisms and norms and for developing the initial inklings of hope together.

This space is not something that exists in the typical 350.org online campaign or Sierra Club mailing. It is not necessarily something that those groups should attempt to emulate unless they aim to begin developing truly bottom-up, grassroots community groups. However, for the many other communities around the country where groups of individuals are gathering together to try to understand climate change and the role they can play in its abatement and their own resilience, an understanding of this space is critical. It provided the space to process and plan for the future and helped to build commitment among members. The importance of this space should be noted particularly by those who focus on traditional media or education campaigns and struggle to understand why those campaigns do not result in desired changes. With an issue like

climate change, the space to be together in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes has great worth.

A second key finding relates to the structure of Transition Gardiner. Structure is an elusive thing – too much can create rigidity and too little can create mayhem. In between those poles is an organizational culture that allows for the development of that space elucidated above. Transition Gardiner is, compared to most non-profit organizations, almost completely unstructured. However, that comparison hides a culture that has considerable implicit structure. They do not have 501(c)3 status and some do not even use agendas for their meetings. They abhor flip charts and “strategic planning.” Nonetheless, they have developed working agreements about basing decisions on consensus, being altruistic and working for the benefit of the community, and doing work that is feasible, manageable, and meaningful to their volunteer-based membership. This constitutes a structure within itself, one that encourages flexibility and creativity and empowers the members by involving them to a great degree in the group’s direction and chosen work.

Although this unstructured structure is viewed by most interviewees as being overwhelmingly desirable, it comes with its own challenges. As anyone who has worked in a consensus-based environment knows, consensus can be time-consuming and frustrating. Designing long-term goals and attributing shorter-term projects and activities to them can be even more time-consuming and frustrating. Certainly, any work that is entirely volunteer-based faces obstacles with organizational viability as key members come and go, with life needs of their own. Still, the participants found this format worthwhile and rewarding. These elements of the group make it reminiscent of an anarchist collective. One Grand Rapids, Michigan collective defines the structure thus:

A collective is a group of individuals who work together on a common project without relying on internal hierarchies. Collectives can be large or small. They might exist temporarily or over long periods, and membership in them is voluntary... In collectives, leadership happens naturally and fluidly. All skills and knowledge are shared, not hoarded by an elite. This means that duties and responsibilities can be rotated among a collective's members and that they can be revoked if anyone starts abusing their power. This horizontal structure is a dynamic and vital way to constantly increase member-empowerment (Sprout Anarchist Collective).

This is an area where further research could greatly elucidate the broader variety of organizational structural types and could assist other organizations with navigating the difficult process of introspective wayfinding.

A third finding is closely related to what might be expected given the empowerment literature: the importance of building awareness and capacity. Participants in any kind of empowering organization need to be given the information needed to become experts on the issue that is disempowering to them. They need to develop a critical awareness of the system within which that issue exists. They need to develop the capacity, through leadership skills and hands-on adaptive skills, to overcome those system blocks and begin to create change within their lives and their communities. The issue of climate change is no different. Transition Gardiner members developed a deep understanding of climate change, peak oil, and economic instability through their participation in the organization and although they sometimes found that knowledge depressing and disempowering, membership in the group overwhelmingly made them want to continue to use that knowledge and capacity for good.

The fourth finding, on the importance of and challenges with outreach and bridging, is closely related to the social capital literature. While members of TG have brainstormed many ways in which they could reach out to other community groups and have developed partnerships with some closely-aligned organizations, they have not been as effective in reaching beyond those initial partnerships or in meaningfully engaging the vast majority of the 330 members of

their mailing list. This finding points out the ways in which the group's members imagine they might be able to engage those individuals and groups; it also points out the murkiness of those options and the difficulty interviewees had perceiving which might bear the best results.

I have offered my recommendation for the best way to engage new members, by developing a loosely-held network of sub-organizations or "working groups" that function very similarly to those now in existence. These would take advantage of the development of strong ties that occurs within a particular group and utilize the weak ties that members likely already have throughout the community but may be reticent to employ. However, as Granovetter (1983) explains, those weak ties are an important asset for any group and ignoring them can cause a group to become overly internally focused and even cliquish. This question of how to build strong internal ties while developing strong bridges to those outside of the group is one that affects all organizations, as private corporations seek new markets and non-profits seek new audiences. For a volunteer-run organization working on an issue as difficult as climate change though, it can make or break the group's success. Transition Gardiner will need to continue to search out the best method for their group and further research on this topic would be an excellent asset for them and other organizations in their shoes.

A fifth finding explores the participant's perceptions of climate change. At times, interviewees explained that they see climate change as frightening, urgent, and overwhelming. It is dangerous and, perhaps more importantly, nearly entirely unknown. On one hand, this makes it difficult to plan for and on another hand, this makes it all the more overwhelming, as it becomes easy to snowball potential impacts into ever larger catastrophic events. As some noted, when even scientists seem scared, you know you are facing an intimidating opponent. At other times though, interviewees expressed a certain complacency with climate change: it is going to

happen and there is nothing we can do about it except be as prepared as possible. This seems to be the dominant perception of climate change and explains the group's focus on individual and community resilience. This finding begs the question of what is needed from an international perspective to truly impact climate change, to begin the work of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions to an extent that will limit climate change. Should we, as an international climate activist community, be more focused on the urgency of climate change or more focused on larger-scale advocacy? Regardless of what is needed internationally, it is important to understand that this localized scale and this focus on individual resilience is what works in Gardiner. For these individuals, a focus on larger-scale advocacy would be entirely disempowering due to the system blocks they perceive and the slow response time of result and reaction to any individual action. Whereas resilience can be felt in a newly blooming community garden down the street from your house, efficacy is difficult to sense when the target is far away and largely invisible to the average citizen. Perhaps it is most important for groups such as TG to continue this work of resilience on the ground in individual communities, while groups such as 350.org continue to engage citizens in advocacy work across the nation and around the world. The worth of TG is important nonetheless.

Finally, the sixth finding revolves around the key question of empowerment and disempowerment. Using Kieffer's (1984) illustration of the process of empowerment, it appears that there is a high level of empowerment among the interviewees. Just as empowerment is not experienced in exactly the same way by different people, there is not one key phrase that can be looked for or method that can be used to determine a finite point in time when a person is empowered. However, statements made by many of the interviewees point to critical awareness of the issue being faced, capacity to address the issue, visible in developed senses of self-efficacy

and collective efficacy, and actions being taken to take advantage of that efficacy. Additionally, there were statements by several interviewees that pointed to internal changes, the sense that being a part of TG had changed them fundamentally and they were now activated and empowered citizens as opposed to bystanders. For all intents and purposes, TG can be considered a success: they have engaged their members, they have activated them, and they have empowered them. This is not to say that members do not experience some moments of doubt, some periods of disempowerment; for the most part though, they experience the sense that these are issues that are worth addressing and which they have the ability to address. Those dual views are critical for people working on climate change to understand.

Nonetheless, climate change still presents an unwieldy burden. It is important for future activists or actors in the climate change movement to recognize this point: even those who clearly understand the urgency of climate change may still not quite know what to do with that information. Even those who are empowered have moments of disempowerment, of resorting to feelings of fear and ‘doom-and-gloom.’ However, it appears that this can be addressed, to a certain extent, by refocusing the work of the group on local resilience. This can offer multiple benefits of giving participants something tangible to work on, offering them easy, feasible actions to take part in, with the potential that the impacts of those actions will be rapid and visible and thus, empowering. Additionally, a focus on resilience allows participants to sidestep the greater, global system blocks to a certain extent and avoid the disempowerment that can come along with working on an issue, only to see it dissolve due to the power of those at an untouchable national or international level. Although the actions individuals can take may not stop climate change from occurring, they are things that people can actually do and they can engage people in the work of addressing climate change, adding active members to the greater

movement who may be galvanized into action at critical points in time. The three-part focus of Transition on climate change, peak oil, and economic instability is also relevant here as it increases the breadth of people who are brought in to the group's area of interest. These are assets which should not be disregarded.

### ***Implications***

What do these findings mean for future work in this area? How can they contribute to the work of Transition Gardiner and to the work of other organizations around the country? Because this is a single case study, it is important at this juncture to be clear about the constraints of the methodology. We cannot draw confident conclusions about empowerment for all people in all circumstances and with all organizations from this research. However, what can be done is use the knowledge gained to determine communities, organizations, and groups of people to whom it might be best transferable. To do that, it is necessary to briefly re-evaluate the context within which this research was conducted.

The community of Gardiner is simultaneously unique and common. It's location near a mid-sized liberal city and its history of environmental activism and exploration perhaps makes it more suitable than the average American city for a group like TG to survive and flourish. Certainly, the work would be made more difficult if this was a town in, say, central Kansas, with few similarly-minded institutions, traditions, and individuals nearby. That limits the transferability of this research somewhat, as one could make the argument that the community context was an important element to the group's success. Additionally, Gardiner is a community that has seen significant in-migration from retirees in the last few decades. How does that affect this group? Are people more likely to join because, as newcomers, they are already seeking community and relationships? How would the work of this group be different if it was based in a

community where people already had strong networks? These questions deserve further research.

Transition Gardiner and its operational style also deserve review. One can be sure that this organizational culture would not work for everyone. Some people strongly desire structure; that was visible in many of the interviewees' comments. It is also important to consider the Transition movement more generally. While its focus on three main issues offers breadth, it is likely still not enough breadth to bring in some citizens to whom peak oil, climate change, and economic instability are simply not motivating issues. Many organizations struggle with this question of how broad a mission can become before it becomes watered down. I would not advise the Transition movement to further broaden their mission; however, that mission may mean that not every community has a large enough population that *does* care about those issues to make a Transition Initiative successful. To be honest, I am not overly concerned by that. I agree with my interviewees that not everyone will jump on board right away and that it may take some negative event or disaster to motivate the majority of people. What is needed now is a groundswell of interest from those who are motivated by these issues to begin to create change within their communities. That this may not be possible in all communities does not worry me if it is something that is possible in enough communities. Defining 'enough' becomes then the next challenge. At what point does a small groundswell of interest reach a tipping point? This is yet another question for future research.

Moving from TG to the individual level raises a number of questions about the transferability of this data. The interviewees were all older, white newcomers. Would similar results be found if this research was duplicated with younger activists? People of color? How might responses be different with people who are more affected by climate change, such as

coastal dwellers or island dwellers? Or middle-aged people or people who had lived within a community their entire lives? Perhaps more interestingly, is there something in particular about this generation of people that makes them more likely to participate? Interviewees mentioned that young people had attended some of their events and book clubs; why had the young not stayed on? Perhaps TG is attractive to the population I interviewed simply because they have more time to spare as they do not have children in the home and are beginning to slow the pace of their work lives. Perhaps as they have aged they have reached a point in their lives where they begin to self-actualize. If so, it is possible that their new (or renewed) navel-gazing has increased their interest in doing for others or taking part in something larger, both of which goals could be fulfilled by participation in an organization like TG. Is that altruism a requisite for participation? Regardless, there remain several questions about what made this group in particular interested in TG. Only through comparison with additional groups might an answer come to light.

Although future research is necessary to understand this process of empowerment more clearly, it appears there are some preliminary recommendations that could be made to groups attempting to work in this arena. The following list elucidates some of those recommendations.

1. Pay attention to the space your group creates. In what ways can you build in support systems for your participants?
2. Play with structure. Both highly structured environments and highly un-structured environments will be turn-offs to different participants. Create opportunities with different types of structures if possible. Be willing to be flexible and try different sizes and operating styles.
3. Educate your participants, both in terms of concrete knowledge about the problem and the more abstract skills of organizing, such as leadership and capacity-building.
4. Do not let education become your sole purpose. Education alone will not empower the vast majority of people. Integrate other kinds of opportunities. Information alone will likely disempower and deter participation.
5. Reach out to your community. Building a strong choir is important, but so is the work of building a bigger choir. Consider groups with similar missions but, if possible, also

utilize the personal relationships your members have. Use those diverse links to broaden the reach of your organization. It is possible that education is better received when it comes from a close, trusted source than from even the most well laid-out pamphlet.

6. Consider using clear, actionable projects to bring people together around a common task. This can make volunteers feel active and engaged and can create mutual opportunities for learning.
7. Learn about the psychology of climate change and try to appreciate why individuals hesitate to participate. It is complex and complicated and worth understanding.
8. Use that knowledge to be more empathetic with participants as they work through the challenges of climate change. They need your support.
9. Consider a focus on resilience instead of abating climate change. It may make participants more willing to engage and it may provide a greater sense of efficacy as the group sees the impacts of its actions more rapidly and closer at hand.
10. Find ways to self-evaluate on empowerment. Kieffer's (1984) research may be a helpful tool for evaluating individual empowerment. Maton's (2008) research may be helpful for evaluating organizational empowerment (both whether the organization is successful at empowering others and whether it is empowered itself).

### ***Future Research***

This research leaves many questions unanswered. Several have been described already. Generally though, while the psychology of inaction has been researched extensively, the psychology of action within this context deserves far greater research. Further research into the challenges presented by these new organizational structures and cultures, including the work of bridging, is also necessary. In the vein of Kent's (2009) work, more research is also needed into the social construction of individualized responsibility. Whose responsibility is climate change? Governments and private industries have done an effective job of encouraging us to believe that the answer lies in individuals changing light bulbs and riding bicycles; however, does this relieve actors at regional, state, national, and international scales of their responsibilities? How do we continue to require accountability at all scales?

More questions stem from these. How do we evaluate what type of action is most effective at various scales? What does it mean to "address climate change" at the individual,

community, organizational, regional, national, or international level? Is the work different? Is some work more important or needed than others? Without reverting to light bulbs and bicycles, how do we create meaningful action at the individual level? Is resilience the best focus for individual and community-level work? Does it offer an adequate solution to helping to solve the climate problem? If so, is it the best focus for all individuals? Does this work for everyone – what about those who are most anxious about climate change? Will they be satisfied by focusing on resilience? What about those who have no interest in climate change at all? How can we engage them? A corollary research topic of interest would be to study a group that has a similar organizational style but is not focused on resilience, perhaps a 350.org local group.

How will we know when we have “gotten there”? With an issue as huge and complex as climate change, and with actions as localized and diverse as those proposed by efforts to become more resilient, how do we evaluate progress? Similarly, given a focus on resilience, when will we know that climate change has “gotten here”? At what point has the climate changed? How would we know it when it arrived? It would be interesting to re-evaluate this group in the future to look at whether their goals had changed as their work progressed. Perhaps the focus on resilience is necessary because perhaps an individual needs to have a solid sense of resilience before they have the capacity to really address climate change at a larger scale. Will TG’s focus become wider geographically or more directed towards abating climate change as they experience success with resilience? One claim that I have heard in personal conversations is that this budding groundswell is important because these people represent an activate-able public, meaning that they are waiting in the wings for the moments when they are needed, like for national moments of particular need such as organizing against the Keystone XL pipeline or rallying around a United Nations climate conference. However, does this focus on resilience

actually mean an alienation from that type of work, a turning inward? Would these people be willing to work on a large scale political advocacy issue if one became apparent?

I have loved conducting this research because it seems that around every turn, with every realization that I have, I find more and more questions to ask. Further research on all of these is critical if we are to address climate change quickly, and in a way that is relevant to the general public. However, this research should not be misconstrued as arguing for localized, community-based efforts alone. The work of addressing climate change at the national and international levels needs to continue as well. Policy advocacy, in particular, is absolutely necessary. However, the work of mobilizing members of cities and towns around the world needs to happen simultaneously. It is my hope that this research can add to our understanding of that necessary and timely movement, to the work of building our 'blessed unrest' (Hawken 2008). I hope that it will offer insight to those who are working to engage people with the issue of climate change and will impress upon them the importance of these findings. The work we have done thus far hoping that effective marketing and communication of the problem will engage citizens will not suffice. Nor will national level advocacy alone. We need to have more people on the ground in communities around the country who are talking to their neighbors about climate change and who are beginning to do something, anything to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Let us not delay in working to build these leaders, coalitions, and grassroots organizations. We need them more than we may think.

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